

Ward's Popular Classics

ROBERT BROWNING'S POEMS

1833-1848

VOL. II

Hutchinson's Popular Classics

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THE
POETICAL WORKS
OF
ROBERT
BROWNING

1833-1858

VOL. II

With Frontispiece Portrait of the Author

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ROBERT BROWNING

Born at Camberwell, May 7, 1812

Died at Venice, December 12, 1889

Proofs of this reprint have been read with the original issues of Browning's works. A few notes concerning the poems will be found at the end of each volume. For fuller information the reader may consult with much advantage Mr. Edward Berdoo's 'Browning Cyclopædia.'

A. R. W.

The portrait of Robert Browning which forms the frontispiece to this volume is from an engraving by J. C. Armytage from a drawing taken early in the poet's life.

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON
A TRAGEDY

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

PERSONS

MILDRED TRESHAM.

GUENDOLEN TRESHAM.

THOROLD, Lord Tresham.

AUSTIN TRESHAM.

HENRY, Earl Mertoun.

GERARD.

Other Retainers of Lord Tresham.

TIME, 17—.

ACT I

SCENE I. *The interior of a Lodge in LORD TRESHAM'S Park. Many Retainers crowded at the window, supposed to command a view of the entrance to his Mansion. GERARD, the Warrener, sitting alone, his back to a table on which are flaggons, &c.*

1st Ret. Ay—do—push, friends, and then you'll push down me.

—What for? Does any hear a runner's foot,
Or a steed's trample, or a coach-wheel's cry?
Is the Earl come or his least poursuivant?
But there's no breeding in a man of you
Save Gerard yonder: here's a half-place yet,
Old Gerard!

Ger. Save your courtesies, my friend.
Here is my place.

2nd Ret. Now, Gerard, out with it!
What makes you sullen, this of all the days

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

I' the year? To-day that, young, rich, bountiful,
Handsome Earl Mertoun, whom alone they match
With our Lord Tresham thro' the country-side,
Is coming here in utmost bravery
To ask our Master's Sister's hand?

Ger.

What then?

2nd Ret. What then? Why, you she speaks to,
she meets

Your worship, smiles on as you hold apart
The boughs to let her thro' her forest walks,
You, always favourite for your no-deserts,
You've heard, these three days, how Earl Mertoun su
To lay his heart, and house, and broad lands too,
At Lady Mildred's feet—and while we squeeze
Ourselves into a mousehole lest we miss
One congee of the least page in his train,
You sit o' one side—"there's the Earl," say I—
"What then," say you!

3rd Ret.

I'll wager he has let

Both swans he tamed for Lady Mildred, swim
Over the falls and gain the river!

Ger.

Ralph,

Is not to-morrow my inspecting-day
For you and for your hawks?

4th Ret.

Let Gerard be!

He's coarse-grained, like his carved black cross-bo
stock.

Ha, look now, while we squabble with him, look!
Well done, now—is not this beginning, now,
To purpose?

1st Ret.

Our retainers look as fine—

That's comfort! Lord, how Richard holds himself
With his white staff! Will not a knave behind
Prick him upright?

4th Ret.

He's only bowing, fool!

The Earl's man bent us lower by this much.

1st Ret. That's comfort. Here's a very cavalcade

3rd Ret. I don't see wherefore Richard, and his tro
Of silk and silver varlets there, should find
Their perfumed selves so indispensable

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

On high days, holy-days! Would it so disgrace
Our Family, if I, for instance, stood—
In my right hand a cast of Swedish hawks,
A leash of greyhounds in my left?—

Ger. —With Hugh

The logman for supporter—in his right
The bill-hook—in his left the brushwood-shears!

3rd Ret. Out on you, crab! What next, what next?
The Earl!

1st Ret. Oh, Walter, groom, our horses, do they
match

The Earl's? Alas, that first pair of the six—
They paw the ground—Ah, Walter! and that brute
Just on his haunches by the wheel!

6th Ret. Ay—Ay!

You, Philip, are a special hand, I hear,
At soups and sauces—what's a horse to you?
D'ye mark that beast they've slid into the midst
So cunningly?—then, Philip, mark this further;
No leg has he to stand on!

1st Ret. No? That's comfort.

2nd Ret. Peace, Cook! The Earl descends.—Well,
Gerard, see

The Earl at least! Come, there's a proper man,
I hope! Why, Ralph, no falcon, Pole or Swede,
Has got a starrier eye—

3rd Ret. His eyes are blue—

But leave my hawks alone!

4th Ret. So young, and yet

So tall and shapely!

5th Ret. Here's Lord Tresham's self!

There now—there's what a nobleman should be!
He's older, graver, loftier, he's more like
A House's Head!

2nd Ret. But you'd not have a boy
—And what's the Earl beside?—possess too soon
That stateliness?

1st Ret. Our Master takes his hand—
Richard and his white staff are on the move—
Back fall our people—(tsh!—there's Timothy

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Sure to get tangled in his ribbon-ties—
And Peter's cursed rosette's a-coming off!)
—At last I see our Lord's back and his friend's—
And the whole beautiful bright company
Close round them—in they go! [*Jumping down from
the window-bench, and making for the table and
its jugs, &c.*] Good health, long life,
Great joy to our Lord Tresham and his House!

6th Ret. My father drove his father first to court,
After his marriage-day—ay, did he!

2nd Ret. God bless
Lord Tresham, Lady Mildred, and the Earl!
Here, Gerard, reach your beaker!

Ger. Drink, my boys:
Don't mind me—all's not right about me—drink!

2nd Ret. [*Aside.*] He's vexed, now, that he let the
show escape!

[*To GER.*] Remember that the Earl returns this way—

Ger. That way?

2nd Ret. Just so.

Ger. Then my way's here. [*Goes.*

2nd Ret. Old Gerard

Will die soon—mind, I said it! He was used
To care about the pitifullest thing
That touched the House's honour, not an eye
But his could see wherein—and on a cause
Of scarce a quarter this importance, Gerard
Fairly had fretted flesh and bone away
In cares that this was right, nor that was wrong,
Such a point decorous, and such by rule—
(He knew such niceties, no herald more)
And now—you see his humour: die he will!

2nd Ret. God help him! Who's for the great
servants'-hall

To hear what's going on inside? They'd follow
Lord Tresham into the saloon.

3rd Ret. I!—

4th Ret. I!—

Leave Frank alone for catching, at the door,
Some hint of how the parley goes inside!

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Prosperity to the great House once more—
Here's the last drop!

1st Ret. Have at you! Boys, hurrah!

SCENE II. *A Saloon in the Mansion.*

Enter Lord TRESHAM, Lord MERTOUN; AUSTIN, and GUENDOLEN.

Tresh. I welcome you, Lord Mertoun, yet once more,
To this ancestral roof of mine. Your name
—Noble among the noblest in itself,
Yet taking in your person, fame avers,
New price and lustre,—(as that gem you wear,
Transmitted from a hundred knightly breasts,
Fresh chased and set and fixed by its last lord,
Seems to re-kindle at the core)—your name
Would win you welcome!—

Mer. Thanks!

Tresh. —But add to that,

The worthiness and grace and dignity
Of your proposal for uniting both
Our Houses even closer than respect
Unites them now—add these, and you must grant
One favor more, nor that the least,—to think
The welcome I should give;—'tis given! My lord,
My only brother, Austin—he's the King's.
Our cousin, Lady Guendolen—betrothed
To Austin: all are yours.

Mer. I thank you—less

For the expressed commendings which your seal,
And only that, authenticates—forbids
My putting from me . . . to my heart I take
Your praise . . . but praise less claims my gratitude,
Than the indulgent insight it implies
Of what must needs be uppermost with one
Who comes, like me, with the bare leave to ask,
In weighed and measured unimpassioned words,
A gift, which, if as calmly 'tis denied,
He must withdraw, content upon his cheek,

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Despair within his soul:—that I dare ask
Firmly, near boldly, near with confidence
That gift, I have to thank you.—Yes, Lord Tresham,
I love your sister—as you'd have one love
That lady . . . oh more, more I love her! Wealth,
Rank, all the world thinks *me*, they're yours, you
know,

To hold or part with, at your choice—but grant
My true self, *me* without a rood of land,
A piece of gold, a name of yesterday,
Grant me that lady, and you . . . Death or life?

Guen. [*apart to Aus.*] Why, this is loving, Austin!

Aus. He's so young!

Guen. Young? Old enough, I think, to half surmise
He never had obtained an entrance here,
Were all this fear and trembling needed.

Aus. Hush!
He reddens.

Guen. Mark him, Austin; that's true love!
Ours must begin again.

Tresh. We'll sit, my lord.
Ever with best desert goes diffidence.
I may speak plainly nor be misconceived.
That I am wholly satisfied with you
On this occasion, when a falcon's eye
Were dull compared with mine to search out faults,
Is somewhat. Mildred's hand is hers to give
Or to refuse.

Mer. But you, you grant my suit?
I have your word if hers?

Tresh. My best of words
If hers encourage you. I trust it will.
Have you seen Lady Mildred, by the way?

Mer. I . . . I . . . our two demesnes, remember,
touch—

I have been used to wander carelessly
After my stricken game—the heron roused
Deep in my woods, has trailed its broken wing
Thro' thicks and glades a mile in yours,—or else
Some eyass ill-reclaimed has taken flight

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

And lured me after her from tree to tree,
I marked not whither . . . I have come upon
The Lady's wondrous beauty unaware,
And—and then . . . I have seen her.

Guen. [*aside to AUS.*] Note that mode
Of faltering out that when a lady passed
He, having eyes, did see her! You had said—
“On such a day I scanned her, head to foot;
“Observed a red, where red should not have been,
“Outside her elbow; but was pleased enough
“Upon the whole.” Let such irreverent talk
Be lessoned for the future!

Tresh. What's to say
May be said briefly. She has never known
A mother's care; I stand for father too.
Her beauty is not strange to you, it seems—
You cannot know the good and tender heart,
Its girl's trust and its woman's constancy,
How pure yet passionate, how calm yet kind,
How grave yet joyous, how reserved yet free
As light where friends are—how embued with lore
The world most prizes, yet the simplest, yet
The . . . one might know I talked of Mildred—thus
We brothers talk!

Mer. I thank you.

Tresh. In a word,
Control's not for this lady; but her wish
To please me outstrips in its subtlety
My power of being pleased—herself creates
The want she means to satisfy. My heart
Prefers your suit to her as 'twere its own.
Can I say more?

Mer. No more—thanks, thanks—no more!

Tresh. This matter then discussed . . .

Mer. . . . We'll waste no breath
On aught less precious—I'm beneath the roof
That holds her: while I thought of that, my speech
To you would wander—as it must not do,
Since as you favour me I stand or fall.
I pray you suffer that I take my leave!

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Tresh. With less regret 'tis suffered, that again
We meet, I hope, so shortly.

Mer. We? again?—

Ah yes, forgive me—when shall . . . you will crown
Your goodness by forthwith apprising me
When . . . if . . . the Lady will appoint a day
For me to wait on you—and her.

Tresh. So soon

As I am made acquainted with her thoughts
On your proposal—howsoe'er they lean—
A messenger shall bring you the result.

Mer. You cannot bind me more to you, my lord.
Farewell till we renew . . . I trust, renew
A converse ne'er to disunite again.

Tresh. So may it prove!

Mer. You, Lady, you, Sir, take
My humble salutation!

Guen. & Aus. Thanks!

Tresh. Within there!

[*Servants enter.* TRESHAM conducts MERTOUN to the
door. Meantime AUSTIN remarks,

Well,

Here I have an advantage of the Earl,
Confess now! I'd not think that all was safe
Because my lady's brother stood my friend.
Why, he makes sure of her—"do you say, yes—
"She'll not say, no"—what comes it to beside?
I should have prayed the brother, "speak this speech,
"For Heaven's sake urge this on her—put in this—
"Forget not, as you'd save me, t'other thing,—
"Then set down what she says, and how she looks,
"And if she smiles," and (in an under breath)
"Only let her accept me, and do you
"And all the world refuse me, if you dare!"

Guen. That way you'd take, friend Austin? What
a shame

I was your cousin, tamely from the first
Your bride, and all this fervour's run to waste!
Do you know you speak sensibly to-day?
The Earl's a fool.

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Aus. Here's Thorold. Tell him so!

Tresh. [*returning.*] Now, voices, voices! 'St! the lady's first!

How seems he?—seems he not . . . come, faith give fraud

The mercy-stroke whenever they engage!

Down with fraud—up with faith! How seems the Earl?

A name! a blazon! if you knew their worth,

As you will never! come—the Earl?

Guen. He's young.

Tresh. What's she? an infant save in heart and brain

Young! Mildred is fourteen, remark! And you . . .

Austin, how old is she?

Guen. There's tact for you!

I meant that being young was good excuse

If one should tax him . . .

Tresh. Well?

Guen. —With lacking wit.

Tresh. He lacked wit? Where might he lack wit, so please you?

Guen. In standing straiter than the steward's rod

And making you the tiresomest harangues,

Instead of slipping over to my side

And softly whispering in my ear, "Sweet lady,

"Your cousin there will do me detriment

"He little dreams of—he's absorbed, I see,

"In my old name and fame—be sure he'll leave

"My Mildred, when his best account of me

"Is ended, in full confidence I wear

"My grandsire's periwig down either cheek.

"I'm lost unless your gentleness vouchsafes" . . .

Tresh. . . . "To give a best of best accounts, yourself,

"Of me and my demerits." You are right!

He should have said what now I say for him.

You golden creature, will you help us all?

Here's Austin means to vouch for much, but you

—You are . . . what Austin only knows! Come up,

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

All three of us—she's in the Library
No doubt, for the day's wearing fast. Precede!

Guen. Austin, how we must—!

Tresh. Must what? Must speak truth,
Malignant tongue! Detect one fault in him!
I challenge you!

Guen. Witchcraft's a fault in him,
For you're bewitched.

Tresh. What's urgent we obtain
Is, that she soon receive him—say, to-morrow—
Next day at farthest.

Guen. Ne'er instruct me!

Tresh. Come!
—He's out of your good graces since, forsooth,
He stood not as he'd carry us by storm
With his perfections! You're for the composed,
Manly, assured, becoming confidence!
—Get her to say, "to-morrow," and I'll give you . . .
I'll give you back Urganda, to be spoiled
With petting and snail-paces. Will you? Come!

SCENE III. MILDRED'S Chamber. *A painted window
overlooks the park.* MILDRED and GUENDOLEN.

Guen. Now, Mildred, spare those pains. I have not
left

Our talkers in the Library, and climbed
The wearisome ascent to this your bower
In company with you,—I have not dared . . .
Nay, worked such prodigies as sparing you
Lord Mertoun's pedigree before the flood,
Which Thorold seemed in very act to tell—
—Or bringing Austin to pluck up that most
Firm-rooted heresy—your suitor's eyes,
He would maintain, were gray instead of blue—
I think I brought him to contrition!—Well,
I have not done such things, (all to deserve
A minute's quiet cousin's—talk with you,)
To be dismissed so coolly!

Mil. Guendolen,

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

What have I done . . . what could suggest . . .

Guen.

There, there!

Do I not comprehend you'd be alone
To throw those testimonies in a heap,
Thorold's enlargings, Austin's brevities,
With that poor, silly, heartless Guendolen's
Ill-timed, misplaced, attempted smartnesses—
And sift their sense out? now, I come to spare you
Nearly a whole night's labour. Ask and have!
Demand, be answered! Lack I ears and eyes?
Am I perplexed which side of the rock-table
The Conqueror dined on when he landed first,
Lord Mertoun's ancestor was bidden take—
The bow-hand or the arrow-hand's great meed?
Mildred, the Earl has soft blue eyes!

Mil.

My brother—

Did he . . . you said that he received him well?

Guen. If I said only "well" I said not much—
Oh, stay—which brother?

Mil.

Thorold! who—who else?

Guen. Thorold (a secret) is too proud by half,—
Nay, hear me out—with us he's even gentler
Than we are with our birds. Of this great House
The least retainer that e'er caught his glance
Would die for him, real dying—no mere talk:
And in the world, the court, if men would cite
The perfect spirit of honour, Thorold's name
Rises of its clear nature to their lips:
But he should take men's homage, trust in it,
And care no more about what drew it down.
He has desert, and that, acknowledgment;
Is he content?

Mil.

You wrong him, Guendolen.

Guen. He's proud, confess; so proud with brooding
o'er

The light of his interminable line,
An ancestry with men all paladins,
And women all . . .

Mil. Dear Guendolen, 'tis late!

When yonder purple pane the climbing moon

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Pierces, I know 'tis midnight.

Guen. Well, that Thorold
Should rise up from such musings, and receive
One come audaciously to graft himself
Into this peerless stock, yet find no flaw,
No slightest spot in such an one. . . .

Mil. Who finds
A spot in Mertoun?

Guen. Not your brother; therefore,
Not the whole world.

Mil. I'm weary, Guendolen.—
Bear with me!

Guen. I am foolish.

Mil. Oh, no, kind—
But I would rest.

Guen. Good night and rest to you.
I said how gracefully his mantle lay
Beneath the rings of his light hair?

Mil. Brown hair!

Guen. Brown? why it is brown—how could you
know that?

Mil. How? did not you—Oh Austin 'twas, declared
His hair was light, not brown—my head!—and, look,
The moon-beam purpling the dark chamber! Sweet,
Good night!

Guen. Forgive me—sleep the soundlier for me!
[*Going, she turns suddenly.*
Mildred!

Perdition! all's discovered.—Thorold finds
—That the Earl's greatest of all grandmothers
Was grander daughter still—to that fair dame
Whose garter slipped down at the famous dance!
[*Goes.*

Mil. Is she—can she be really gone at last?
My heart—I shall not reach the window! Needs
Must I have sinned much, so to suffer!

[*She lifts the small lamp which is suspended before
the Virgin's image in the window, and places it
by the purple pane.* There!

[*She returns to the seat in front.*

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Mildred and Mertoun! Mildred, with consent
Of all the world and Thorold,—Mertoun's bride!
Too late! 'Tis sweet to think of, sweeter still
To hope for, that this blessed end soothes up
The curse of the beginning; but I know
It comes too late—'twill sweetest be of all
To dream my soul away and die upon!

[*A noise without.*

The voice! Oh! why, why glided sin the snake
Into the Paradise Heaven meant us both?

[*The window opens softly.—A low voice sings.*

There's a woman like a dew-drop, she's so purer than the purest;
And her noble heart's the noblest, yes, and her sure faith's the surest;
And her eyes are dark and humid, like the depth on depth of lustre
Hid i' the harebell, while her tresses, sunnier than the wild-grape cluster,
Gush in golden-tinted plenty down her neck's rose-misted marble;
Then her voice's music . . . call it the well's bubbling, the bird's warble!

[*A figure wrapped in a mantle appears at the window.*

And this woman says, "My days were sunless and my nights were
moonless,
"Parched the pleasant April herbage, and the lark's heart's outbreak
tuneless,
"If you loved me not!" And I who—(ah, for words of flame!) adore her!
Who am mad to lay my spirit prostrate palpably before her—

[*He enters—approaches her seat, and bends over her.*

I may enter at her portal soon, as now her lattice takes me,
And by noontide as by midnight make her mine, as hers she makes me!

[*The Earl throws off his slouched hat and long cloak.*

My very heart sings, so I sing, beloved!

Mil. Sit, Henry—do not take my hand.

Mer.

'Tis mine!

The meeting that appalled us both so much
Is ended.

Mil. What begins now?

Mer.

Happiness

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Such as the world contains not.

Mil.

That is it.

Our happiness would, as you say, exceed
The whole world's best of blisses: we—do we
Deserve that? Utter to your soul, what mine
Long since, beloved, has grown used to hear,
Like a death-knell, so much regarded once,
And so familiar now; this will not be!

Mer. Oh, Mildred, have I met your brother's face,
Compelled myself—if not to speak untruth,
Yet to disguise, to shun, to put aside
The truth, as what had e'er prevailed on me
Save you, to venture? Have I gained at last
Your brother, the one scarer of your dreams,
And waking thoughts' sole apprehension too?
Does a new life, like a young sunrise, break
On the strange unrest of our night, confused
With rain and stormy flaw—and will you see
No dripping blossoms, no fire-tinted drops
On each live spray, no vapour steaming up,
And no expressless glory in the east?
When I am by you, to be ever by you,
When I have won you and may worship you,
Oh, Mildred, can you say "this will not be?"

Mil. Sin has surprised us; so will punishment.

Mer. No—me alone, who sinned alone!

Mil.

The night

You likened our past life to—was it storm
Throughout to you then, Henry?

Mer.

Of your life

I spoke—what am I, what my life, to waste
A thought about when you are by me?—you
It was, I said my folly called the storm
And pulled the night upon.—'Twas day with me—
Perpetual dawn with me.

Mil.

Come what, come will,

You have been happy—take my hand!

Mer. [after a pause.]

How good

Your brother is! I figured him a cold—
Shall I say, haughty man?

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Mil.

They told me all.

I know all.

Mer.

It will soon be over.

Mil.

Over?

Oh, what is over? what must I live thro'
And say, "'tis over?" Is our meeting over?
Have I received in presence of them all
The partner of my guilty love,—with brow
Trying to seem a maiden's brow—with lips
Which make believe that when they strive to form
Replies to you and tremble as they strive,
It is the nearest ever they approached
A stranger's . . . Henry, yours that stranger's . . . lip—
With cheek that looks a virgin's, and that *is* . . .
Ah, God! some prodigy of thine will stop
This planned piece of deliberate wickedness
In its birth even—some fierce leprous spot
Will mar the brow's dissimulating—I
Shall murmur no smooth speeches got by heart,
But, frenzied, pour forth all our woeful story,
The love, the shame, and the despair—with them
Round me aghast as men round some cursed fount
That should spirt water, and spouts blood. I'll not
. . . Henry, you do not wish that I should draw
This vengeance down? I'll not affect a grace
That's gone from me—gone once, and gone for ever!

Mer. Mildred, my honor is your own. I'll share

Disgrace I cannot suffer by myself.

A word informs your brother I retract

This morning's offer; time will yet bring forth

Some better way of saving both of us.

Mil. I'll meet their faces, Mertoun!

Mer.

When? to-morrow?

Get done with it!

Mil.

Oh, Henry, not to-morrow!

Next day! I never shall prepare my words

And looks and gestures sooner!—How you must

Despise me!

Mer.

Mildred, break it if you choose,

A heart the love of you uplifted—still

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Uplifts, thro' this protracted agony,
To Heaven! but, Mildred, answer me,—first pace
The chamber with me—once again—now, say
Calmly the part, the . . . what it is of me
You see contempt (for you did say contempt)
—Contempt for you in! I would pluck it off
And cast it from me!—but no—no, you'll not
Repeat that?—will you, Mildred, repeat that?

Mil. Dear Henry—

Mer. I was scarce a boy—e'en now
What am I more? And you were infantine
When first I met you—why, your hair fell loose
On either side!—my fool's cheek reddens now
Only in the recalling how it burned
That morn to see the shape of many a dream
—You know we boys are prodigal of charms
To her we dream of—I had heard of one,
Had dreamed of her, and I was close to her,
Might speak to her, might live and die her own,
Who knew?—I spoke—Oh, Mildred, feel you not
That now, while I remember every glance
Of yours, each word of yours, with power to test
And weigh them in the diamond scales of Pride,
Resolved the treasure of a first and last
Heart's love shall have been bartered at its worth,
—That now I think upon your purity
And utter ignorance of guilt—your own
Or other's guilt—the girlish undisguised
Delight at a strange novel prize—(I talk
A silly language, but interpret, you!)
If I, with fancy at its full, and reason
Scarce in its germ, enjoined you secrecy,
If you had pity on my passion, pity
On my protested sickness of the soul
To sit beside you, hear you breathe, and watch
Your eyelids and the eyes beneath—if you
Accorded gifts and knew not they were gifts—
If I grew mad at last with enterprise
And must behold my beauty in her bower
Or perish—(I was ignorant of even

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

My own desires—what then were you?) if sorrow—
Sin—if the end came—must I now renounce
My reason, blind myself to light, say truth
Is false and lie to God and my own soul?
Contempt were all of this!

Mil. Do you believe . . .

Or, Henry, I'll not wrong you—you believe
That I was ignorant. I scarce grieve o'er
The past! We'll love on—you will love me still!

Mer. Oh, to love less what one has injured! Dove,
Whose pinion I have rashly hurt, my breast—
Shall my heart's warmth not nurse thee into strength?
Flower I have crushed, shall I not care for thee?
Bloom o'er my crest my fight-mark and device!
Mildred, I love you and you love me!

Mil. Go!

Be that your last word. I shall sleep to-night.

Mer. This is not our last meeting?

Mil. One night more.

Mer. And then—think, then!

Mil. Then, no sweet courtship-days,
No dawning consciousness of love for us,
No strange and palpitating births of sense
From words and looks, no innocent fears and hopes,
Reserves and confidences: morning's over!

Mer. How else should love's perfected noontide
follow?

All the dawn promised shall the day perform.

Mil. So may it be! but—

You are cautious, love?
Are sure that unobserved you scaled the walls?

Mer. Oh, trust me! Then our final meeting's fixed?
To-morrow night?

Mil. Farewell! Stay, Henry . . . wherefore?
His foot is on the yew-tree bough—the turf
Receives him—now the moonlight as he runs
Embraces him—but he must go—is gone—
Ah, once again he turns—thanks, thanks, my love!
He's gone—Oh, I'll believe him every word!
I was so young—I loved him so—I had

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

No mother—God forgot me—and I fell.
There may be pardon yet—all's doubt beyond.
Surely the bitterness of death is past!

ACT II

SCENE. *The Library.*

Enter LORD TRESHAM hastily.

This way—In, Gerard, quick!

[As GERARD enters, TRESHAM secures the door.

Now speak! or, wait—

I'll bid you speak directly.

[Seats himself.

Now repeat

Firmly and circumstantially the tale

You've just now told me; it eludes me; either

I did not listen, or the half is gone

Away from me—How long have you lived here?

Here in my house, your father kept our woods

Before you?

Ger. —As his father did, my lord.

I have been eating sixty years, almost,

Your bread.

Tresh. Yes, yes—You ever were of all
The servants in my father's house, I know,
The trusted one. You'll speak the truth.

Ger. I'll speak
God's truth: night after night . . .

Tresh. Since when?

Ger. At least
A month—each midnight has some man access
To Lady Mildred's chamber.

Tresh. Tush, "access"—
No wide words like "access" to me!

Ger. He runs
Along the woodside, crosses to the south,
Takes the left tree that ends the avenue . . .

Tresh. The last great yew-tree?

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Ger. You might stand upon
The main boughs like a platform . . . Then he . . .

Tresh. Quick!

Ger. . . . Climbs up, and, where they lessen at the
top,

—I cannot see distinctly, but he throws,
I think—for this I do not vouch—a line
That reaches to the Lady's casement—

Tresh. —Which

He enters not! Gerard—some wretched fool
Dares pry into my sister's privacy!
When such are young, it seems a precious thing
To have approached,—to merely have approached,
Got sight of, the abode of her they set
Their frantic thoughts upon! He does not enter?
Gerard?

Ger. There is a lamp that's full in the midst,
Under a red square in the painted glass
Of Lady Mildred's . . .

Tresh. Leave that name out! Well?
That lamp?

Ger. —Is moved at midnight higher up
To one pane—a small dark-blue pane—he waits
For that among the boughs; at sight of that,
I see him, plain as I see you, my lord,
Open the Lady's casement, enter there . . .

Tresh. —And stay?

Ger. An hour, two hours.

Tresh. And this you saw
Once?—twice?—quick!

Ger. Twenty times.

Tresh. And what brings you
Under the yew-trees?

Ger. The first night I left
My range so far, to track the stranger stag
That broke the pale, I saw the man.

Tresh. Yet sent
No cross-bow shaft thro' the marauder?

Ger. But
He came, my lord, the first time he was seen,

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

In a great moonlight, light as any day,
From Lady Mildred's chamber.

Tresh. [after a pause.] You have no cause—
—Who could have cause to do my sister wrong?

Ger. Oh, my lord, only once—let me this once
Speak what is on my mind! Since first I noted
All this, I've groaned as if a fiery net
Plucked me this way and that—fire, if I turned
To her, fire if I turned to you, and fire,
If down I flung myself and strove to die.
The lady could not have been seven years old
When I was trusted to conduct her safe
Thro' the deer-herd to stroke the snow-white fawn
I brought to eat bread from her tiny hand
Within a month. She ever had a smile
To greet me with—she . . . if it could undo
What's done to lop each limb from off this trunk . . .
All that is foolish talk, not fit for you—
I mean, I could not speak and bring her hurt
For Heaven's compelling: but when I was fixed
To hold my peace, each morsel of your food
Eaten beneath your roof, my birth-place too,
Choked me. I wish I had grown mad in doubts
What it behoved me do. This morn it seemed
Either I must confess to you, or die:
Now it is done, I seem the vilest worm
That crawls, to have betrayed my Lady!

Tresh.

No—

No—Gerard!

Ger. Let me go!

Tresh.

A man, you say—

What man? Young? Not a vulgar hind? What
dress?

Ger. A slouched hat and a large dark foreign cloak
Wraps his whole form: even his face is hid;
But I should judge him young; no hind, be sure!

Tresh. Why?

Ger. He is ever armed: his sword projects
Beneath the cloak.

Tresh. Gerard,—I will not say

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

No word, no breath of this!

Ger.

Thanks, thanks, my lord!

[Goes.]

TRESHAM paces the room. After a pause,

Oh, thought's absurd!—as with some monstrous fact
That, when ill thoughts beset us, seems to give
Merciful God that made the sun and stars
The waters and the green delights of earth,
The lie! I apprehend the monstrous fact—
Yet know the Maker of all worlds is good,
And yield my reason up, inadequate
To reconcile what yet I do behold—
Blasting my sense! There's cheerful day outside—
This is my library—and this the chair
My father used to sit in carelessly,
After his soldier-fashion, while I stood
Between his knees to question him—and here,
Gerard our gray retainer,—as he says,
Fed with our food from sire to son an age,—
Has told a story—I am to believe!
That Mildred . . . oh no, no! both tales are true,
Her pure cheek's story and the forester's!
Would she, or could she, err—much less, confound
All guilts of treachery, of craft, of . . . Heaven
Keep me within its hand!—I will sit here
Until thought settles and I see my course.
Avert, oh God, only this woe from me!

[As he sinks his head between his arms on the table,

GUENDOLEN'S voice is heard at the door.

Lord Tresham! *[She knocks.]* Is Lord Tresham there?

[TRESHAM, hastily turning, pulls down the first book above him and opens it.]

Tresh.

Come in! *[She enters.]*

Ah, Guendolen—good morning.

Guen.

Nothing more?

Tresh. What should I say more?

Guen.

Pleasant question! more?

This more! Did I besiege poor Mildred's brain

Last night till close on morning with "the Earl"—

"The Earl"—whose worth did I asseverate

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Till I am very fain to hope that . . . Thorold,
What is all this? You are not well!

Tresh.

Who, I?

You laugh at me.

Guen.

Has what I'm fain to hope
Arrived, then? Does that huge tome show some blot
In the Earl's 'scutcheon come no longer back
Than Arthur's time?

Tresh.

When left you Mildred's chamber?

Guen. Oh late enough, I told you! The main thing
To ask is, how I left her chamber,—sure,
Content yourself, she'll grant this paragon
Of Earls no such ungracious . . .

Tresh.

Send her here!

Guen. Thorold?

Tresh.

I mean--acquaint her, Guendolen,—
—But mildly!

Guen.

Mildly?

Tresh.

Ah, you guess'd aright!
I am not well—there is no hiding it.
But tell her I would see her at her leisure—
That is, at once! here in the Library!
The passage in that old Italian book
We hunted for so long is found, say,—found—
And if I let it slip again . . . you see,
That she must come—and instantly!

Guen.

I'll die

Piecemeal, record that, if there have not gloomed
Some blot i' the 'scutcheon!

Tresh.

Go! or, Guendolen,

Be you at call,—with Austin, if you choose,—
In the adjoining gallery—There, go! [GUENDOLEN goes.
Another lesson to me! you might bid
A child disguise his heart's sore, and conduct
Some sly investigation point by point
With a smooth brow, as well as bid me catch
The inquisitorial cleverness some praise!
If you had told me yesterday, "There's one
"You needs must circumvent and practise with
"Entrap by policies, if you would worm

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

"The truth out—and that one is—Mildred!" There—
There—reasoning is thrown away on it!
Prove she's unchaste . . . why you may after prove
That she's a poisoner, traitress, what you will!
Where I can comprehend nought, nought's to say,
Or do, or think! Force on me but the first
Abomination,—then outpour all plagues,
And I shall ne'er make count of them!

Enter MILDRED.

Mil.

What book

Is it I wanted, Thorold? Guendolen
Thought you were pale—you are not pale! That book?
That's Latin surely!

Tresh.

Mildred—here's a line—

(Don't lean on me—I'll English it for you)

"Love conquers all things." What love conquers them?
What love should you esteem—best love?

Mil.

True love.

Tresh. I mean, and should have said, whose love is
best

Of all that love or that profess to love?

Mil. The list's so long—there's father's, mother's,
husband's . . .

Tresh. Mildred, I do believe a brother's love

For a sole sister must exceed them all!

For see now, only see! there's no alloy

Of earth that creeps into the perfect'st gold

Of other loves—no gratitude to claim;

You never gave her life—not even aught

That keeps life—never tended her, instructed,

Enriched her—so your love can claim no right

O'er hers save pure love's claim—that's what I call

Freedom from earthliness. You'll never hope

To be such friends, for instance, she and you,

As when you hunted cowslips in the woods,

Or played together in the meadow hay.

Oh yes—with age, respect comes, and your worth

Is felt, there's growing sympathy of tastes,

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

There's ripened friendship, there's confirmed esteem,
—Much head these make against the new-comer!
The startling apparition—the strange youth—
Whom one half-hour's conversing with, or, say,
Mere gazing at, shall change (beyond all change
This Ovid ever sang about!) your soul
. . . *Her* soul, that is,—the sister's soul! With her
'Twas winter yesterday; now, all is warmth,
The green leaf's springing and the turtle's voice,
“Arise and come away!” Come whither?—far
Enough from the esteem, respect, and all
The brother's somewhat insignificant
Array of rights! all which he knows before—
Has calculated on so long ago!
I think such love, (apart from yours and mine,)
Contented with its little term of life,
Intending to retire betimes, aware
How soon the back-ground must be place for it,
I think, am sure, a brother's love exceeds
All the world's loves in its unworldliness.

Mil. What is this for?

Tresh. This, Mildred, is it for!

Oh, no, I cannot go to it so soon!
That's one of many points my haste left out—
Each day, each hour throws forth its silk-slight film
Between the being tied to you by birth,
And you, until those slender threads compose
A web that shrouds her daily life of hopes
And fears and fancies, all her life, from yours—
So close you live and yet so far apart!
And must I rend this web, tear up, break down
The sweet and palpitating mystery
That makes her sacred? You—for you I mean,
Shall I speak—shall I not speak?

Mil. Speak!

Tresh. I will.

Is there a story men could—any man
Could tell of you, you would conceal from me?
I'll never think there's falsehood on that lip!
Say, “There is no such story men could tell,”

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

And I'll believe you, tho' I disbelieve
The world . . . the world of better men than I,
And women such as I suppose you—Speak!
[After a pause.] Not speak? Explain then! clear it
up, then! Move
Some of the miserable weight away
That presses lower than the grave! Not speak?
Some of the dead weight, Mildred! Ah, if I
Could bring myself to plainly make their charge
Against you! Must I, Mildred? Silent still?
[After a pause.] Is there a gallant that has night by
night

Admittance to your chamber?

[After a pause.] Then, his name!
Till now, I only had a thought for you—
But now,—his name!

Mil. Thorold, do you devise
Fit expiation for my guilt, if fit
There be! 'tis nought to say that I'll endure
And bless you,—that my spirit yearns to purge
Her stains off in the fierce renewing fire—
But do not plunge me into other guilt!
Oh, guilt enough! I cannot tell his name.
Tresh. Then judge yourself! How should I act?
Pronounce!

Mil. Oh, Thorold, you must never tempt me thus!
To die here in this chamber by that sword
Would seem like punishment—so should I glide,
Like an arch-cheat, into extremest bliss!
'Twere easily arranged for me! but you—
What would become of you?

Tresh. And what will now
Become of me? I'll hide your shame and mine
From every eye; the dead must heave their hearts
Under the marble of our chapel-floor;
They cannot rise and blast you! You may wed
Your paramour above our mother's tomb;
Our mother cannot move from 'neath your foot.
We two will somehow wear this one day out:
But with to-morrow hastens here—the Earl!

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

The youth without suspicion that faces come
From Heaven, and hearts from . . . whence proceed
such hearts?

I have despatched last night at your command
A missive bidding him present himself
To-morrow here—thus much is said—the rest
Is understood as if 'twere written down—
“His suit finds favour in your eyes,”—now dictate
This morning's letter that shall countermand
Last night's—do dictate that!

Mil. But, Thorold—if

I will receive him as I said?

Tresh. *The Earl?*

Mil. I will receive him!

Tresh. [*Starting up.*] Ho there! Guendolen!

GUENDOLEN and AUSTIN enter.

And, Austin, you are welcome too! Look there!
The woman there!

Aus. & Guen. How? Mildred?

Tresh. Mildred once!

Now the receiver night by night, when sleep
Blesses the inmates of her father's house,
—I say, the soft sly wanton that receives
Her guilt's accomplice 'neath this roof which holds
You, Guendolen, you, Austin, and has held
A thousand Treshams—never one like her!
No lighter of the signal lamp her quick
Foul breath near quenches in hot eagerness
To mix with breath as foul! no loosener
Of the lattice, practised in the stealthy tread,
The low voice and the noiseless come-and-go!
Not one composer of the Bacchant's mien
Into—what you thought Mildred's, in a word!
Know her!

Guen. Oh, Mildred look to me, at least!
Thorold—she's dead, I'd say, but that she stands
Rigid as stone and whiter!

Tresh. You have heard . . .

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Guen. Too much! you must proceed no further!

Mil. Yes—

Proceed—All's truth! Go from me!

Tresh. All is truth,
She tells you! Well, you know, or ought to know,
All this I would forgive in her. I'd con
Each precept the harsh world enjoins, I'd take
Our ancestors' stern verdicts one by one,
I'd bind myself before them to exact
The prescribed vengeance—and one word of hers,
The sight of her, the bare least memory
Of Mildred, my one sister, my heart's pride
Above all prides, my all in all so long,
Had scattered every trace of my resolve!
What were it silently to waste away
And see her waste away from this day forth,
Two scathed things with leisure to repent,
And grow acquainted with the grave, and die,
Tired out if not at peace, and be forgotten?
It were not so impossible to bear!
But this—that, fresh from last night's pledge renewed
Of love with the successful gallant there,
She'll calmly bid me help her to entice,
Inveigle an unconscious trusting youth
Who thinks her all that's chaste, and good, and pure,
—Invite me to betray him . . . who so fit
As honor's self to cover shame's arch-deed?
—That she'll receive Lord Mertoun—(her own phrase)—
This, who could bear? Why, you have heard of thieves,
Stabbers, the earth's disgrace—who yet have laughed,
“Talk not of tortures to me—I'll betray
“No comrade I've pledged faith to!”—you have heard
Of wretched women—all but Mildreds—tied
By wild illicit ties to losels vile
You'd tempt them to forsake; and they'll reply
“Gold, friends, repute, I left for him, I have
“In him, why should I leave him then for gold,
“Repute, or friends?”—and you have felt your heart
Respond to such poor outcasts of the world
As to so many friends; bad as you please,

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

You've felt they were God's men and women still,
So not to be disowned by you! but she,
That stands there, calmly gives her lover up
As means to wed the Earl that she may hide
Their intercourse the surelier! and, for this,
I curse her to her face before you all!
Shame hunt her from the earth! Then Heaven do right
To both! It hears me now—shall judge her then!

[As MILDRED faints and falls, TRESHAM rushes out.

Aus. Stay, Tresham, we'll accompany you!

Guen.

We?

What, and leave Mildred? We? why, where's my place
But by her side, and where's yours but by mine?
Mildred—one word—only look at me, then!

Aus. No, Guendolen! I echo Thorold's voice!
She is unworthy to behold . . .

Guen.

Us two?

If you spoke on reflection, and if I
Approved your speech—if you (to put the thing
At lowest) you, the soldier, bound to make
The King's cause yours, and fight for it, and throw
Regard to others of its right or wrong,
—If with a death-white woman you can help,
Let alone sister, let alone a Mildred,
You left her—or if I, her cousin, friend
This morning, playfellow but yesterday,
Who've said, or thought at least a thousand times,
"I'd serve you if I could," should now face round
And say, "Ah, that's to only signify
"I'd serve you while you're fit to serve yourself—
"So long as fifty eyes await the turn
"Of yours to forestall its yet half-formed wish,
"I'll proffer my assistance you'll not need—
"When every tongue is praising you, I'll join
"The praisers' chorus—when you're hemmed about
"With lives between you and detraction—lives
"To be laid down if a rude voice, rash eye,
"Rough hand should violate the sacred ring
"Their worship throws about you,—then indeed,
"Who'll stand up for you stout as I?" If so

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

We said and so we did,—not Mildred there
Would be unworthy to behold us both,
But we should be unworthy, both of us,
To be beheld by—by—your meanest dog,
Which, if that sword were broken in your face
Before a crowd, that badge torn off your breast,
And you cast out with hootings and contempt,
—Would push his way thro' all the hooters, gain
Your side, go off with you and all your shame
To the next ditch you choose to die in! Austin,
Do you love me? Here's Austin, Mildred,—here's
Your brother says he does not believe half—
No, nor half that—of all he heard! He says,
Look up and take his hand!

Aus. Look up and take
My hand, dear Mildred!

Mil. I—I was so young!
Beside, I loved him, Thorold—and I had
No mother—God forgot me—so I fell!

Guen. Mildred!

Mil. Require no further! Did I dream
That I could palliate what is done? All's true.
Now, punish me! A woman takes my hand!
Let go my hand! You do not know, I see—
I thought that Thorold told you.

Guen. What is this?
Where start you to?

Mil. Oh Austin, loosen me!
You heard the whole of it—your eyes were worse,
In their surprise, than Thorold's! Oh, unless
You stay to execute his sentence, loose
My hand! Has Thorold gone, and are you here?

Guen. Here, Mildred, we two friends of yours will
wait

Your bidding; be you silent, sleep or muse!
Only, when you shall want your bidding done,
How can we do it if we are not by?
Here's Austin waiting patiently your will!
One spirit to command, and one to love
And to believe in it and do its best,

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Poor as that is, to help it—why, the world
Has been won many a time, its length and breadth,
By just such a beginning!

Mil. I believe
If once I threw my arms about your neck
And sunk my head upon your breast, that I
Should weep again!

Guen. Let go her hand now, Austin.
Wait for me.—Pace the gallery and think
On the world's seemings and realities
Until I call you. [AUSTIN goes.

Mil. No—I cannot weep!
No more tears from this brain—no sleep—no tears!
O Guendolen, I love you!

Guen. Yes: and “love”
Is a short word that says so very much!
It says that you confide in me.

Mil. Confide!

Guen. Your lover's name, then! I've so much to
learn,
Ere I can work in your behalf!

Mil. My friend,
You know I cannot tell his name.

Guen. At least
He is your lover? and you love him too?

Mil. Ah, do you ask me that?—but I am fallen
So low!

Guen. You love him still, then?

Mil. My sole prop
Against the guilt that crushes me! I say,
Each night ere I lie down, “I was so young—
“I had no mother—and I loved him so!”
And then God seems indulgent, and I dare
Trust him my soul in sleep.

Guen. How could you let us
E'en talk to you about Lord Mertoun then?

Mil. There is a cloud around me.

Guen. But you said
You would receive his suit in spite of this?

Mil. I say there is a cloud . . .

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Guen. No cloud to me!

Lord Mertoun and your lover are the same!

Mil. What maddest fancy . . .

Guen. [*calling aloud.*] Austin! (Spare your pains—
When I have got a truth, that truth I keep!—

Mil. By all you love, sweet Guendolen, forbear!
Have I confided in you . . .

Guen. Just for this!

Austin!—Oh, not to guess it at the first!

But I *did* guess it—that is, I divined—

Felt by an instinct how it was—why else

Should I pronounce you free from all that heap

Of sins which had been irredeemable?

I felt they were not yours—what other way

Than this, not yours? The secret's wholly mine!

Mil. If you would see me die before his face . . .

Guen. I'd hold my peace! And if the Earl returns
To-night?

Mil. Ah, Heaven, he's lost!

Guen. I thought so! Austin!

Enter AUSTIN.

Oh, where have you been hiding?

Aus. Thorold's gone,

I know not how, across the meadow-land.

I watched him till I lost him in the skirts

Of the beech-wood.

Guen. Gone? All thwarts us!

Mil. Thorold too?

Guen. I have thought. First lead this Mildred to
her room.

Go on the other side: and then we'll seek

Your brother; and I'll tell you, by the way,

The greatest comfort in the world. You said

There was a clew to all. Remember, sweet,

He said there was a clew! I hold it. Come!

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

ACT III

SCENE I. *The end of the Yew-tree Avenue under MILDRED'S window. A light seen through a central red pane.*

Enter TRESHAM through the trees.

Again here! But I cannot lose myself.
The heath—the orchard—I have traversed glades
And dells and bosky paths which used to lead
Into green wild-wood depths, bewildering
My boy's adventurous step; and now they tend
Hither or soon or late; the blackest shade
Breaks up, the thronged trunks of the trees ope wide,
And the dim turret I have fled from fronts
Again my step; the very river put
Its arm about me and conducted me
To this detested spot. Why then, I'll shun
Their will no longer—do your will with me!
Oh, bitter! To have reared a towering scheme
Of happiness, and to behold it razed,
Were nothing: all men hope, and see their hopes
Frustrate, and grieve awhile, and hope anew.
But I . . . to hope that from a line like ours
No horrid prodigy like this would spring,
Were just as though I hoped that from these old
Confederates against the sovereign day,
Children of older and yet older sires
(Whose living coral berries dropped, as now
On me, on many a baron's surcoat once,
On many a beauty's wimple) would proceed
No poison-tree, to thrust, from Hell its root,
Hither and thither its strange snaky arms.
Why came I here? What must I do?—[*A bell strikes.*]
—A bell?
Midnight! and 'tis at midnight . . . Ah, I catch
—Woods, river, plains, I catch your meaning now,
And I obey you! Hist! This tree will serve!

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

[*He retires behind one of the trees. After a pause enter MERTOUN cloaked as before,*

Mer. Not time! Beat out thy last voluptuous beat

Of hope and fear, my heart! I thought the clock
In the chapel struck as I was pushing thro'
The ferns. And so I shall no more see rise
My love-star! Oh, no matter for the past!
So much the more delicious task to see
Mildred revive: to pluck out, thorn by thorn,
All traces of the rough forbidden path
My rash love lured her to! Each day must see
Some fear of hers effaced, some hope renewed!
Then there will be surprises, unforeseen
Delights in store. I'll not regret the past!

[*The light is placed above in the purple pane.*
And see, my signal rises! Mildred's star!
I never saw it lovelier than now
It rises for the last time! If it sets,
'Tis that the re-assuring sun may dawn!

[*As he prepares to ascend the last tree of the avenue, TRESHAM arrests his arm.*

Unhand me—peasant, by your grasp! Here's gold.
'Twas a mad freak of mine. I said I'd pluck
A branch from the white-blossomed shrub beneath
The casement there! Take this, and hold your peace.

Tresh. Into the moonlight yonder, come with me!
—Out of the shadow!

Mer. I am armed, fool!

Tresh. Yes,

Or no?—You'll come into the light, or no?

My hand is on your throat—refuse!—

Mer. That voice!

Where have I heard . . . no—that was mild and slow.

I'll come with you! [*They advance.*

Tresh. You're armed—that's well.

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Your name—who are you?

Mer. (Tresham!—she is lost!)

Tresh. Oh, silent? Do you know, you bear yourself

Exactly as, in curious dreams I've had
How felons, this wild earth is full of, look
When they're detected, still your kind has looked!
The bravo holds an assured countenance,
The thief is voluble and plausible,
But silently the slave of lust has crouched
When I have fancied it before a man!
Your name?

Mer. I do conjure Lord Tresham—ay,
Kissing his foot, if so I might prevail—
That he for his own sake forbear to ask
My name! As Heaven's above, his future weal
Or woe depends upon my silence! Vain!
I read your white inexorable face!
Know me, Lord Tresham!

[*He throws off his disguises.*

Tresh. Mertoun!

[*After a pause.*] Draw now!

Mer. Hear me

But speak first!

Tresh. Not one least word on your life!
Be sure that I will strangle in your throat
The least word that informs me how you live
And yet seem what you seem! No doubt 'twas you
Taught Mildred still to keep that face and sin!
We should join hands in frantic sympathy
If you once taught me the unteachable,
Explained how you can live so, and so lie!
With God's help I retain, despite my sense,
The old belief—a life like yours is still
Impossible! Now draw!

Mer. Not for my sake,
Do I entreat a hearing—for your sake,
And most, for her sake!

Tresh. Ha, ha, what should I
Know of your ways? A miscreant like yourself,

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

How must one rouse his ire?—A blow?—that's pride
No doubt, to him! one spurns him, does one not?
Or sets the foot upon his mouth—or spits
Into his face! Come—which, or all of these?

Mer. 'Twixt him, and me, and Mildred, Heaven be
judge!

Can I avoid this? Have your will, my Lord!

[He draws, and, after a few passes, falls.]

Tresh. You are not hurt?

Mer. You'll hear me now!

Tresh. But rise!

Mer. Ah, Tresham, say I not "you'll hear me
now!"

And what procures a man the right to speak
In his defence before his fellow-man,
But—I suppose—the thought that presently
He may have leave to speak before his God
His whole defence?

Tresh. Not hurt? It cannot be!

You made no effort to resist me. Where
Did my sword reach you? Why not have returned
My thrusts? Hurt where?

Mer. My lord—

Tresh. How young he is!

Mer. Lord Tresham, I am very young, and yet
I have entangled other lives with mine.
Do let me speak—and do believe my speech,
That when I die before you presently,—

Tresh. Can you stay here till I return with help?

Mer. Oh, stay by me! When I was less than boy
I did you grievous wrong, and knew it not—
Upon my honor, knew it not! Once known,
I could not find what seemed a better way
To right you than I took: my life—you feel
How less than nothing had been giving you
The life you've taken! But I thought my way
The better—only for your sake and hers.
And as you have decided otherwise,
Would I had an infinity of lives
To offer you!—now say—instruct me—think!

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

'Can you from out the minutes I have left
Eke out my reparation? Oh—think—think!
For I must wring a partial—dare I say,
Forgiveness from you, ere I die?

Tresh.

I do

Forgive you.

Mer.

Wait and ponder that great word
Because, if you forgive, I shall hope
To speak to you of—Mildred!

Tresh.

Mertoun,—haste

And anger have undone us. 'Tis not you
Should tell me for a novelty you're young—
Thoughtless—unable to recall the past!
Be but your pardon ample as my own!

Mer. Ah, Tresham, that a sword-stroke and a drop
Of blood or two, should bring all this about!
Why, 'twas my very fear of you—my love
Of you—(what passion's like a boy's for one
Like you?)—that ruined me! I dreamed of you—
You, all accomplished, courted everywhere,
The scholar and the gentleman. I burned
To knit myself to you—but I was young,
And your surpassing reputation kept me
So far aloof—oh, wherefore all that love?
With less of love, my glorious yesterday
Of praise and gentle words and kindest looks,
Had taken place perchance six months ago!
Even now—how happy we had been! And yet
I know the thought of this escaped you, Tresham!
Let me look up into your face—I feel
'Tis changed above me—yet my eyes are glazed.
Where? where?

[*As he endeavours to raise himself, his eye catches
the lamp.*

Ah, Mildred! What will Mildred do?
Tresham, her life is bound up in the life
That's bleeding fast away!—I'll live—must live,
There! if you'll only turn me I shall live
And save her! Tresham—oh, had you but heard!
Had you but heard! What right have you to set

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

The thoughtless foot upon her life and mine,
And then say, as we perish, "Had I thought,
"All had gone otherwise." We've sinned and die:
Never you sin, Lord Tresham!—for you'll die,
And God will judge you.

Tresh. Yes, be satisfied—

That process is begun.

Mer. And she sits there

Waiting for me. Now, say you this to her—
You—not another—say, I saw him die
As he breathed this—"I love her"—(you don't know
What those three small words mean) say, loving her
Lowers me down the bloody slope to death
With memories . . . I speak to her—not you,
Who had no pity—will have no remorse,
Perchance intend her . . . Die along with me,
Dear Mildred!—'tis so easy—and you'll 'scape
So much unkindness! Can I lie at rest,
With rude speech spoken to you, ruder deeds
Done to you—heartless men to have my heart,
And I tied down with grave-clothes and the worm,
Aware, perhaps, of every blow—Oh God!—
Upon those lips—yet of no power to tear
The felon stripe by stripe? Die, Mildred! Leave
Their honorable world to them—for God
We're good enough, tho' the world casts us out!

[*A whistle is heard.*]

Tresh. Ho, Gerard!

Enter GERARD, AUSTIN, and GUENDOLEN, with lights.

No one speak! you see what's done!

I cannot bear another voice!

Mer. There's light—

Light all about me and I move to it.

Tresham, did I not tell you—did you not

Just promise to deliver words of mine

To Mildred?

Tresh. I will bear those words to her.

Mer. Now?

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Tresh. Now! Lift you the body, Gerard, and leave me

The head.

[*As they have half raised MERTOUN, he turns suddenly.*]

Mer. I knew they turned me—turn me not from her!

There! stay you! there!

[*Dies.*]

Guen. [*after a pause.*] Austin, remain you here
With Thorold until Gerard comes with help—
Then lead him to his chamber. I must go
To Mildred.

Tresh. Guendolen, I hear each word
You utter—did you hear him bid me give
His message? Did you hear my promise? I,
And only I, see Mildred!

Guen. She will die.

Tresh. Oh no, she will not die! I dare not hope
She'll die. What ground have you to think she'll die?
Why, Austin's with you!

Aus. Had we but arrived
Before you fought!

Tresh. There was no fight at all!
He let me slaughter him—the boy!—I'll trust
The body there to you and Gerard—thus!
Now bear him on before me.

Aus. Whither bear him?

Tresh. Oh, to my chamber. When we meet there
next,
We shall be friends.

[*They bear out the body of MERTOUN.*]
Will she die, Guendolen?

Guen. Where are you taking me?

Tresh. He fell just here!
Now answer me. Shall you in your whole life
—You who have nought to do with Mertoun's fate,
Now you have seen his breast upon the turf,
Shall you e'er walk this way if you can help?
When you and Austin wander arm in arm
Thro' our ancestral grounds, will not a shade

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Be ever on the meadow and the waste—
Another kind of shade than when the night
Shuts the woodside with all its whispers up!
But will you ever so forget his breast
As willingly to cross this bloody turf
Under the black yew avenue? That's well!
You turn your head! and *I* then?—

Guen. What is done

Is done! My care is for the living. Thorold,
Bear up against this burthen—more remains
To set the neck to!

Tresh. Dear and ancient trees

My fathers planted, and I loved so well !
What have I done that, like some fabled crime
Of yore, lets loose a fury leading thus
Her miserable dance amidst you all ?
Oh, never more for me shall winds intone
With all your tops a vast antiphony,
Demanding and responding in God's praise !
Hers ye are now—not mine ! Farewell—Farewell !

SCENE II. MILDRED'S *Chamber*. MILDRED *alone*:

He comes not! I have heard of those who seemed
Resourceless in prosperity,—you thought
Sorrow might slay them when she listed—yet
Did they so gather up their diffused strength
At her first menace, that they bade her strike,
And stood and laughed her subtlest skill to scorn.
Oh, 'tis not so with me! the first woe fell,
And the rest fall upon it, not on me:
Else should I bear that Henry comes not?—fails
Just this first night out of so many nights?
Loving is done with! Were he sitting now,
As so few hours since, on that seat, we'd love
No more—contrive no thousand happy ways
To hide love from the loveless, any more!
I think I might have urged some little point
In my defence, to Thorold; he was breathless
For the least hint of a defence; but no!

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

The first shame over, all that would might fall.
No Henry! Yet I merely sit and think
The morn's deed o'er and o'er. I must have crept
Out of myself. A Mildred that has lost
Her lover—oh, I dare not look upon
Such woe! I crouch away from it! 'Tis she,
Mildred, will break her heart, not I! The world
Forsakes me—only Henry's left me—left?
When I have lost him, for he does not come,
And I sit stupidly. . . . Oh Heaven, break up
This worse than anguish, this mad apathy,
By any means or any messenger!

Tresh. [*without.*] Mildred!

Mil. Come in! Heaven hears me!

[*TRESHAM enters.*]

You? alone?

Oh, no more cursing!

Tresh. Mildred, I must sit.

There—you sit!

Mil. Say it, Thorold—do not look
The curse—deliver all you come to say!
What must become of me? Oh speak that thought
Which makes your brow and cheek so pale!

Tresh. My thought?

Mil. All of it!

Tresh. How we waded—years ago—
After those water-lilies, till the plash,
I know not how, surprised us; and you dared
Neither advance nor turn back, so we stood
Laughing and crying until Gerard came—
Once safe upon the turf, the loudest, too,
For once more reaching the relinquished prize!
How idle thoughts are—some men's—dying men's!
Mildred,—

Mil. You call me kindlier by my name
Than even yesterday—what is in that?

Tresh. It weighs so much upon my mind that I
This morning took an office not my own!
I might . . . of course, I must be glad or grieved,
Content or not, at every little thing
That touches you—I may with a wrung heart

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Even reprove you, Mildred; I did more—
Will you forgive me?

Mil. Thorold? do you mock? . . .

Or no . . . and yet you bid me . . . say that word!

Tresh. Forgive me, Mildred!—are you silent, sweet?

Mil. [*starting up.*] Why does not Henry Mertoun
come to-night?

Are you, too, silent?

[*Dashing his mantle aside, and pointing to his
scabbard, which is empty.*

Ah, this speaks for you!

You've murdered Henry Mertoun! now proceed!

What is it I must pardon? This and all?

Well, I do pardon you—I think I do.

Thorold, how very wretched you must be!

Tresh. He bade me tell you. . . .

Mil. What I do forbid

Your utterance of! so much that you may tell

And will not—how you murdered him . . . but, no!

You'll tell me that he loved me, never more

Than bleeding out his life there—must I say

"Indeed" to that? Enough! I pardon you!

Tresh. You cannot, Mildred! for the harsh words,
yes:

Of this last deed Another's Judge—whose doom

I wait in doubt, despondency, and fear.

Mil. Oh true! there's nought for me to pardon!
True!

You loosed my soul of all its cares at once—

Death makes me sure of him for ever! *You*

Tell me his last words? *He* shall tell me them,

And take my answer—not in words, but reading

Himself the heart I had to read him late,

Which death . . .

Tresh. Death? you are dying too? Well said

Of Guendolen! I dared not hope you'd die—

But she was sure of it.

Mil. Tell Guendolen

I loved her, and tell Austin . . .

Tresh. . . . Him you loved—

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

And me?

Mil. Ah, Thorold! was't not rashly done
To quench that blood, on fire with youth and hope
And love of me, whom you loved too, and yet
Suffered to sit here waiting his approach
While you were slaying him? Oh, doubtlessly
You let him speak his poor confused boy's-speech
—Do his poor utmost to disarm your wrath
And respite me!—you let him try to give
The story of our loves, and ignorance,
And the brief madness, and the long despair—
You let him plead all this, because your code
Of honor bids you hear before you strike:
But at the end, as he looked up for life
Into your eyes—you struck him down!

Tresh.

No! no!

Had I but heard him—had I let him speak
Half the truth—less—had I looked long on him,
I had desisted! Why, as he lay there,
The moon on his flushed cheek, I gathered all
The story ere he told it! I saw thro'
The troubled surface of his crime and yours
A depth of purity immovable!
Had I but glanced, where all seemed turbidest
Had gleamed some inlet to the calm beneath!
I would not glance—my punishment's at hand.
There, Mildred, is the truth! and you—say on—
You curse me?

Mil.

As I dare approach that Heaven
Which has not bade a living thing despair,
Which needs no code to keep its grace from stain,
But bids the vilest worm that turns on it
Desist and be forgiven,—I—forgive not,
But bless you, Thorold, from my soul of souls!

[*Falls on his neck.*]

There! do not think too much upon the past!
The cloud that's broke was all the same a cloud
While it stood up between my friend and you!
You hurt him 'neath its shadow—but is that
So past retrieve? I have his heart, you know—

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

I may dispose of it—I give it you!

It loves you as mine loves! Confirm me, Henry!

[Dies.

Tresh. I wish thee joy, beloved! I am glad
In thy full gladness!

Guen. [without.] Mildred! Tresham!

[Entering with AUSTIN] Thorold,

I could desist no longer. Ah, she swoons!

That's well—

Tresh. Oh! better far than that!

Guen. She's dead!

Let me unlock her arms!

Tresh. She threw them thus
About my neck, and blessed me, and then died.
—You'll let them stay now, Guendolen!

Aus. Leave her
And look to him! What ails you, Thorold?

Guen. White
As she—and whiter! Austin—quick—this side!

Aus. A froth is oozing thro' his clenched teeth—
Both lips, where they're not bitten thro', are black!
Speak, dearest Thorold!

Tresh. Something does weigh down
My neck beside her weight: thanks: I should fall
But for you, Austin, I believe!—there, there—
'Twill pass away soon!—ah, I had forgotten—
I am dying.

Guen. Thorold—Thorold—why was this?

Tresh. I said, just as I drank the poison off,
The earth would be no longer earth to me,
The life out of all life was gone from me!
There are blind ways provided, the foredone
Heart-weary player in this pageant-world
Drops out by, letting the main masque defile
By the conspicuous portal:—I am through—
Just through:—

Guen. Don't leave him, Austin! death is close.

Tresh. Already Mildred's face is peacefuller!
I see you, Austin—feel you—here's my hand,
Put yours in it—You, Guendolen, yours too!

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

You're Lord and Lady now—You're Treshams—Name
And fame are yours—You hold our 'Scutcheon up.
Austin, no Blot on it! You see how blood
Must wash one blot away: the first blot came
And the first blood came. To the vain world's eye
All's gules again—no care to the vain world,
From whence the red was drawn!

Aus.

No blot shall come!

Tresh. I said that—yet it did come. Should it come,
Vengeance is God's not man's. Remember me!

[*Dies.*

Guen. [*letting fall the pulseless arm.*] Ah, Thorold,
we can but—remember you!

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

A PLAY

"Ivy and violet, what do ye here,

"With blossom and shoot in the warm spring-weather,

"Hiding the arms of Monchenci and Vere?"

HANMER.

DEDICATION

NO ONE LOVES AND HONOURS BARRY CORNWALL
MORE THAN ROBERT BROWNING DOES ;
WHO, HAVING NOTHING BETTER THAN THIS PLAY
TO GIVE HIM IN PROOF OF IT,
MUST SAY SO.

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

PERSONS

COLOMBE OF RAVESTEIN, Duchess of Juliers
and Cleves.

SABYNE }
ADOLF } Her Attendants.

GUIBERT }
GAUCELME } Courtiers.
MAUFROY }
CLUGNET }

VALENCE, Advocate of Cleves.

PRINCE BERTHOLD, Claimant of the Duchy.

MELCHIOR, his Confidant.

PLACE, *The Palace at Juliers.*

TIME, 16—.

ACT I.

Morning. SCENE—A corridor leading to the Audience-chamber.

GAUCELME, CLUGNET, MAUFROY, and other Courtiers,
round GUIBERT, who is silently reading a paper:
as he drops it at the end—

Gui. That this should be her birthday; and the day
We all invested her, twelve months ago,
As the late Duke's true heiress and our liege;
And that this also must become the day . . .
Oh, miserable lady!

1st Court. Ay, indeed?

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

2nd Court. Well, Guibert?

3rd Court. But your news, my friend, your news!
The sooner, friend, one learns Prince Berthold's
pleasure,

The better for us all: how writes the Prince?
Give me—I'll read it for the common good—

Gui. In time, sir—but, till time comes, pardon me!
Our old Duke just disclosed his child's retreat,
Declared her true succession to his rule,
And died: this birthday was the day, last year,
We convoyed her from Castle Ravestein—
That sleeps out trustfully its extreme age
On the Meuse' quiet bank, where she lived queen
Over the water-buds,—to Juliers' Court
With joy and bustle: here again we stand;
Sir Gaucelme's buckle's constant to his cap—
To-day's much such another sunny day!

Gau. Come, Guibert—this outgrows a jest, I think!
You're hardly such a novice as to need
The lesson, you pretend.

Gui. What lesson, sir?
That everybody, if he'd thrive at court,
Should, first and last of all, look to himself?
Why, no: and therefore, with your good example,
(—Ho, Master Adolf!)—to myself I'll look.

Enter ADOLF.

Gui. The Prince's letter; why, of all men else,
Comes it to me?

Adolf. By virtue of your place,
Sir Guibert! 'Twas the Prince's express charge,
His envoy told us, that the missive there
Should only reach our lady by the hand
Of whosoever held your place.

Gui. Enough! [*ADOLF retires.*]
Then, gentles, who'll accept a certain poor
Indifferently honourable place,
My friends, I make no doubt, have gnashed their teeth
At leisure minutes these half-dozen years,

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

To find me never in the mood to quit?

—Who asks may have it, with my blessing, and—

This to present our lady. Who'll accept?

You,—you,—you? There it lies, and may, for me!

Mau. [*a youth, picking up the paper, reads aloud.*]

"Prince Berthold, proved by titles following

"Undoubted Lord of Juliers, comes this day

"To claim his own, with licence from the Pope,

"The Emperor, the Kings of Spain and France" . . .

Gau. Sufficient "titles following," I judge!

Don't read another! Well,—“to claim his own?”

Mau. “And take possession of the Duchy held

“Since twelve months, to the true heir's prejudice,

“By” . . . Colombe, Juliers' Mistress, so she thinks,

And Ravestein's mere lady, as we find!

Who wants the place and paper? Guibert's right!

I hope to climb a little in the world,—

I'd push my fortunes,—but, no more than he,

Could tell her on this happy day of days,

That, save the nosegay in her hand, perhaps,

There's nothing left to call her own! Sir Clugnet,

You famish for promotion; what say you?

Clug. [*an old man.*] To give this letter were a sort,

I take it,

Of service: services ask recompence:

What kind of corner may be Ravestein?

Gui. The castle?—Oh, you'd share her fortunes?

Good!

Three walls stand upright, full as good as four,

With no such bad remainder of a roof.

Clug. Oh,—but the Town?

Gui. Five houses, fifteen huts;

A church whereto was once a spire, 'tis judged;

And half a dyke, except in time of thaw

Clug. Still, there's some revenue?

Gui. Else Heaven forfend!

You hang a beacon out, should fogs increase;

So when the Autumn floats of pine-wood steer

Safe 'mid the white confusion, thanks to you,

Their grateful raftsmen flings a guilder in;

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

—That's if he means to pass your way next time.

Clug. If not?

Gui. Hang guilders, then—he blesses you!

Clug. What man do you suppose me? Keep your paper!

And let me say it shows no handsome spirit
To dally with misfortune: keep your place!

Gau. Some one must tell her.

Gui. Some one may: you may!

Gau. Sir Guibert, 'tis no trifle turns me sick
Of court-hypocrisy at years like mine,
But this goes near it. Where's there news at all?
Who'll have the face, for instance, to affirm
He never heard, e'en while we crowned the girl,
That Juliers' tenure was by Salic law;
That one, confessed her father's cousin's child,
And, she away, indisputable heir,
Against our choice protesting and the Duke's,
Claimed Juliers?—nor, as he preferred his claim,
That first this, then another potentate,
Inclined to its allowance?—I, or you,
Or any one except the lady's self?
Oh, it had been the direst cruelty
To break the business to her! Things might change—
At all events, we'd see next masque at end,
Next mummerly over first: and so the edge
Was taken off sharp tidings as they came,
Till here's the Prince upon us, and there's she
—Wreathing her hair, a song between her lips,
With just the faintest notion possible
That some such claimant earns a livelihood
About the world, by feigning grievances
Few pay the story of, but grudge its price,
And fewer listen to, a second time.
Your method proves a failure; now try mine—
And, since this must be carried . . .

Gui. [*snatching the paper from him.*] By your leave
Your zeal transports you! 'Twill not serve the Prince
So much as you expect, this course you'd take;
If she leaves quietly her palace,—well:

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

But if she died upon its threshold,—no :
He'd have the trouble of removing her !
Come, gentles, we're all—what the devil knows !
You, Gaucelme, won't lose character, beside—
You broke your father's heart superiorly
To gather his succession—never blush !
You're from my province, and, be comforted,
They tell of it with wonder to this day—
You can afford to let your talent sleep !
We'll take the very worst supposed, as true—
There, the old Duke knew, when he hid his child
Among the river-flowers at Ravestein,
With whom the right lay ! Call the Prince our Duke !
There, she's no Duchess, she's no anything
More than a young maid with the bluest eyes—
And now, sirs, we'll not break this young maid's heart
Coolly as Gaucelme could and would ! No haste !
His talent's full-blown, ours but in the bud—
We'll not advance to his perfection yet—
Will we, Sir Maufroy ? See, I've ruined Maufroy
For ever as a courtier !

Gau.

Here's a coil—

And, count us, will you ? Count its residue,
This boasted convoy, this day last year's crowd !
A birthday, too—a gratulation-day !
I'm dumb : bid *that* keep silence !

Mau. and others.

Eh, Sir Guibert ?

He's right : that does say something : that's bare truth.
Ten—twelve, I make : a perilous dropping off !

Gui. Pooh—is it audience-hour ? The vestibule
Swarms too, I wager, with the common sort
That want our privilege of entry here.

Gau. Adolf ! [*Re-enter ADOLF.*] Who's outside ?

Gui.

Oh, your looks suffice !

Nobody waiting ?

Mau. [*looking through the door-folds.*] Scarce our
number !

Gui.

'Sdeath !

Nothing to beg for, to complain about ?

It can't be ! Ill news spreads, but not so fast

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

As thus to frighten all the world!

Gau. The world
Lives out of doors, sir—not with you and me
By presence-chamber porches, state-room stairs,
Wherever warmth's perpetual: outside's free
To every wind from every compass-point,
And who may get nipped needs be weather-wise.
The Prince comes and the lady's People go;
The snow-goose settles down, the swallows flee—
Why should they wait for winter-time? 'Tis instinct;
Don't you feel somewhat chilly?

Gui. That's their craft?
And last year's crowdiers-round and criers-forth,
That strewed the garlands, overarched the roads,
Lit up the bonfires, sang the loyal songs!
Well, 'tis my comfort, you could never call me
The People's Friend! The People keep their word—
I keep my place: don't doubt I'll entertain
The People when the Prince comes, and the People
Are talked of!—Then, their speeches—no one tongue
Found respite, not a pen had holiday
—For they wrote, too, as well as spoke, these knaves!
Now see: we tax and tithe them, pill and poll,
They wince and fret enough, but pay they must
—We manage that,—so pay with a good grace
They might as well, it costs so little more.
But when we've done with taxes, meet folk next
Outside the toll-booth and the rating-place,
In public—there they have us if they will,
We're at their mercy after that, you see—
For one tax not ten devils could extort;
Over and above necessity, a grace;
This prompt disbosoming of love, to wit—
Their vine-leaf-wrappage of our tribute-penny,
And crowning attestation, all works well—
Yet this precisely do they thrust on us!
These cappings quick, and crook-and-cringings low,
Hand to the heart, and forehead to the knee,
With grin that shuts the eyes and opes the mouth—
So tender they their love; and tender made,

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Go home to curse you, the first doit you ask;
As if their souls were any longer theirs!
As if they had not given ample warrant
To who should clap a collar on their neck,
Rings in their nose, a goad to either flank,
And take them for the brute they boast themselves!
—Stay—there's a bustle at the outer door—
And somebody entreating . . . that's my name!
Adolf,—I heard my name!

Adolf. 'Twas probably
The Suitor.

Gui. Oh, there is one?

Adolf. With a suit
He'd fain enforce in person.

Gui. The good heart
—And the great fool! Just ope the mid-door's fold—
Is that a lappet of his cloak, I see?

Adolf. If it bear plenteous signs of travel . . . ay,
The very cloak my comrades tore!

Gui. Why tore?

Adolf. He seeks the Duchess' presence in that trim:
Since daybreak, was he posted hercabouts
Lest he should miss the moment.

Gui. Where's he now?

Adolf. Gone for a minute possibly, not more.
They have ado enough to thrust him back.

Gui. Ay—but my name, I caught?

Adolf. Oh, sir—he said
—What was it?—You had known him formerly,
And, he believed, would help him did you guess
He waited now—you promised him as much—
The old plea!—'Faith, he's back,—renews the charge!
[*Speaking at the door.*] So long as the man parleys,
peace outside!

Nor be too ready with your halberts, there!

Gau. My horse bespattered, as he blocked the path,
A thin sour man not unlike somebody.

Adolf. He holds a paper in his breast, whereon
He glances when his cheeks flush and his brow
At each repulse—

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Gau. I noticed he'd a brow.

Adolf. So glancing, he grows calmer, leans awhile
Over the balustrade, adjusts his dress,
And presently turns round, quiet again,
With some new pretext for admittance.—Back!
(*To GUIBERT.*)—Sir, he has seen you! Now cross hal-
berts! Ha—

Pascal is prostrate—there lies Fabian too—
No passage! Whither would the madman press?
Close the doors quick on me!

Gui. Too late—he's here.

Enter, hastily and with discomposed dress, VALENCE.

Val. Sir Guibert, will you help me?—Me, that come
Charged by your townsmen, all who starve at Cleves,
To represent their heights and depths of woe
Before our Duchess and obtain relief!
Such errands barricade such doors, it seems:
But not a common hindrance drives me back
On all the sad yet hopeful faces, lit
With hope for the first time, which sent me forth!
Cleves, speak for me! Cleves' men and women,
speak—

Who followed me—your strongest—many a mile
That I might go the fresher from their ranks,
—Who sit—your weakest—by the city-gates,
To take me fuller of what news I bring
As I return—for I must needs return!
—Can I? 'Twere hard, no listener for their wrongs,
To turn them back upon the old despair—
Harder, Sir Guibert, than imploring thus—
So I do—any way you please—implore!
If you . . . but how should you remember Cleves?
Yet they of Cleves remember you so well!
—Ay, comment on each trait of you they keep,
Your words and deeds caught up at second hand,—
Proud, I believe, at bottom of their hearts,
Of the very levity and recklessness
Which only prove that you forget their wrongs.

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Cleves, the grand town, whose men and women starve,
Is Cleves forgotten?—Then remember me!

You promised me that you would help me once
For other purpose: will you keep your word?

Gui. And who may you be, friend?

Val. Valence of Cleves.

Gui. Valence of . . . not the Advocate of Cleves

I owed my whole estate to, three years back?

Ay, well may you keep silence! Why, my lords,
You've heard, I'm sure, how, Pentecost three years,

I was so nearly ousted of my land

By some knaves' pretext,—(eh? when you refused me

Your ugly daughter, Clugnet,)—and you've heard

How I recovered it by miracle

—(When I refused her)! Here's the very friend,

—Valence of Cleves, all parties have to thank!

Nay, Valence, this procedure's vile in you—

I'm no more grateful than a courtier should,

But politic am I—I bear a brain,

Can cast about a little, might require

Your services a second time! I tried

To tempt you with advancement here to court

—“No!”—well, for curiosity at least

To view our life here—“No!”—our Duchess, then,—

—A pretty woman's worth some pains to see,

Nor is she spoiled, I take it, if a crown

Completes the forehead pale and tresses pure. . . .

Val. Our city trusted me its miseries,

And I am come.

Gui. So much for taste! But “come,”—

So may you be, for anything I know,

To beg the Pope's cross, or Sir Clugnet's daughter,

And with an equal chance you get all three!

If it was ever worth your while to come,

Was not the proper way worth finding too?

Val. Straight to the palace-portal, sir, I came—

Gui. —And said?—

Val. —That I had brought the miseries

Of a whole city to relieve.

Gui. —Which saying

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Won your admittance? You saw me, indeed,
And here, no doubt, you stand : as certainly,
My intervention, I shall not dispute,
Procures you audience ; which, if I procure,
That paper's closely written—by Saint Paul,
Here flock the Wrongs, follow the Remedies,
Chapter and verse, One, Two, A, B, and C—
Perhaps you'd enter, make a reverence,
And launch these “ miseries ” from first to last ?

Val. How should they let me pause or turn aside?

Gau. [to VALENCE.] My worthy sir, one question:
you've come straight

From Cleves, you tell us: heard you any talk
At Cleves about our lady?

Val.	Much.
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5
6	6
7	7
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99	99
100	100

Gau. And what?

Val. Her wish was to redress all wrongs she knew.

Gau. That, you believed?

• Val. You see me, sir !

Gau. —Nor stopped

Upon the road from Cleves to Juliers here,
For any—rumours you might find afloat?

Val. I had my townsmen's wrongs to busy me.

Gau. This is the Lady's birthday, do you know?

—Her day of pleasure?

Val. —I know that the Great,

For Pleasure born, should still be on the watch

To exclude Pleasure when a Duty offers:

Even as, the Lowly too, for Duty born,

May ever snatch a Pleasure if in reach :

Both will have plenty of their birthright, sir!

Gau. [*Aside to GUIBERT.*] Sir Guibert, here's your man! No scruples now—

You'll never find his like! Time presses hard.

I've seen your drift and Adolf's too, this while,

But you can't keep the hour of audience back

Much longer, and at noon the Prince arrives.

[*Pointing to VALENCE.*] Entrust *him* with it—fool no chance away!

Gui.—Him?

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Gau. —With the missive! What's the man to her?

Gui. No bad thought!—Yet, 'tis yours—who ever played

The tempting serpent—else, 'twere no bad thought!
I should—and do—mistrust it for your sake,
Or else . . .

Enter an Official who communicates with ADOLF.

Adolf. The Duchess will receive the Court!

Gui. Give us a moment, Adolf! Valence, friend,
I'll help you: we of the service, you're to mark,
Have special entry, while the herd . . . the folks
Outside, get access through our help alone
—Well, it is so, was so, and I suppose
So ever will be—your natural lot is, therefore,
To wait your turn and opportunity,
And probably miss both. Now, I engage
To set you, here and in a minute's space,
Before the lady with full leave to plead
Chapter and verse, and A, and B, and C,
To heart's content.

Val. I grieve that I must ask,
This being, yourself admit, the custom here,
To what the price of such a favour mounts?

Gui. Just so! You're not without a courtier's tact!
Little at court, as your quick instinct prompts,
Do such as we without a recompense.

Val. Yours is?—

Gui. A trifle: here's a document
'Tis some one's duty to present her Grace—
I say, not mine—these say, not theirs—such points
Have weight at court. Will you relieve us all
And take it?—Just say, "I am bidden lay
"This paper at the Duchess' feet."

Val. No more?
I thank you, sir!

Adolf. Her Grace receives the Court!

Gui. [*Aside.*] Now, *sursum corda*, quoth the mass-
priest! Do—

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Whoever's my kind saint, do let alone
These pushings to and fro, and pullings back ;
Peaceably let me hang o' the devil's arm
The downward path, if you can't pluck me off
Completely ! Let me live quite his, or yours !

[The Courtiers begin to range themselves, and move towards the door.]

After me, Valence ! So our famous Cleves
Lacks bread ? Yet don't we gallants buy their lace ?
And dear enough—it beggars me, I know,
To keep my very gloves fringed properly !
This, Valence, is our Great State Hall you cross :
Yon grey urn's veritable marcasite,
The Pope's gift ; and those salvers testify
The Emperor. Presently you'll set your foot
. . . But you don't speak, friend Valence !

Val.

I shall speak.

Gau. *[Aside to GUIBERT.]* Guibert—it were no such
ungraceful thing

If you and I, at first, seemed horrorstruck
With the bad news. Look here, what you shall do !
Suppose you, first, clap hand to sword and cry
“Yield strangers our allegiance ? First I'll perish
“Beside your Grace” !—and so give me the cue
To . . .

Gui. Clap your hand to note-book and jot down
That to regale the Prince with ? I conceive !
[To VALENCE.] Do, Valence, speak, or I shall half
suspect

You're plotting to supplant us, me the first,
I' the Lady's favour : is't the grand harangue
You mean to make, that thus engrosses you ?
—Which of her virtues you'll apostrophise ?
Or is't the fashion you aspire to start,
Of that close-curved, not unbecoming hair ?
—Or what else ponder you ?

Val.

My townsmen's wrongs !

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

ACT II

Noon. SCENE. *The Presence-chamber.*

The DUCHESS and SABYNE.

The D. Announce that I am ready for the Court!

Sab. 'Tis scarcely audience-hour, I think—your Grace

May best consult your own relief, no doubt,
And shun the crowd; but few can have arrived . . .

The D. Let those not yet arrived, then, keep away!

'Twas *me*, this day, last year at Ravestein,
You hurried. It has been full time, beside,
This half-hour. Do you hesitate?

Sab. Forgive me!

The D. Stay, Sabyne; let me hasten to make sure
Of one true thanker: here with you begins
My audience, claim you first its privilege!
It is my birth's event they celebrate—
You need not wish me more such happy days,
But—ask some favour! Have you none to ask?
Has Adolf none, then? this was far from least
Of much I waited for impatiently,
Assure yourself! It seemed so natural
Your gift, beside this bunch of river-bells.
Should be the power and leave of doing good
To you, and greater pleasure to myself:
You ask my leave to-day to marry Adolf?
The rest is my concern.

Sab. Your Grace is ever
Our Lady of dear Ravestein,—but, for Adolf . . .

The D. "But"? You have not, sure, changed in
your regard
And purpose towards him?

Sab. We change!

The D. Well, then? Well?

Sab. How could we two be happy, and, most like,

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Leave Juliers, when . . . when . . . but 'tis audience-time !

The D. "When, if you left me, I were left indeed"—

Would you subjoin that?—Bid the Court approach !
—Why should we play thus with each other, Sabyne ?
Do I not know, if courtiers prove remiss,
If friends detain me, and get blame for it,
There is a cause ? Of last year's fervid throng
Scarce one half comes now !

Sab. [*Aside.*] One half ? No, alas !

The D. So can the mere suspicion of a cloud
Over my fortunes strike each loyal heart.
They've heard of this Prince Berthold ; and, forsooth,
Each foolish arrogant pretence he makes,
May grow more foolish and more arrogant,
They please to apprehend ! I thank their love !
Admit them !

Sab. [*Aside.*] How much has she really learned ?

The D. Surely, whoever's absent, Tristan waits ?
—Or at least Romuald, whom my father raised
From nothing—come, he's faithful to me, come !
(Sabyne, I should but be the prouder—yes,
And fitter to comport myself aright)
Not Romuald ? Xavier—what said he to that ?
For Xavier hates a parasite, I know !

[SABYNE goes out.]

The D. Well, sunshine's everywhere, and summer too ;

Next year 'tis the old place again, perhaps—
The water-breeze again, the birds again
. . . It cannot be ! It is too late to be !
What part had I, or choice in all of it ?
Hither they brought me ; I had not to think
Nor care, concern myself with doing good
Or ill, my task was just—to live,—to live,
And, answering ends there was no need explain,
To render Juliers happy—so they said.
All could not have been falsehood ! Some was love,
And wonder and obedience—I did all

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

They looked for! Why then cease to do it now?
Yet this is to be calmly set aside,
And—ere next birthday's dawn, for aught I know,
Things change, a claimant may arrive, and I . . .
It cannot nor it shall not be! His right?
Well then, he has the right, and I have not,
—But who bade all of you surround my life
And close its growth up with your Ducal crown
Which, plucked off rudely, leaves me perishing?
I could have been like one of you,—loved, hoped,
Feared, lived and died like one of you—but you
Would take that life away and give me this,
And I will keep this! I will face you—Come!

Enter the Courtiers and VALENCE.

The Courtiers. Many such happy mornings to your
Grace!

The D. [Aside, as they pay their devoir.] The same
words—the same faces,—the same love!

I have been over-fearful. These are few—
But these, at least, stand firmly—these are mine!
As many come as may, and if no more,
'Tis that these few suffice—they do suffice!
What succour may not next year bring me! Plainly
I feared too soon! [*to the Court.*] I thank you, sirs:
all thanks!

*Val. [Aside, as the DUCHESS passes from one group
to another, conversing.]*

'Tis she—the vision this day last year brought,
When for a golden moment at our Cleves
She tarried in her progress hither. Cleves
Chose me to speak its welcome, and I spoke
—Not that she could have noted the recluse
—Ungainly, old before his time—who gazed—
. . . Well, Heaven's gifts are not wasted, and that
gaze

Kept, and shall keep me to the end, her own!
She was above it—but so would not sink
My gaze to earth! The People caught it, hers—

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Thenceforward, mine; but thus entirely mine,
Who shall affirm, had she not raised my soul
Ere she retired and left me—them?—She turns—
There's all her wondrous face at once! The ground
Reels and . . . [*suddenly occupying himself with his
paper.*] These wrongs of theirs I have to plead!

The D. [*to the Court.*] Nay, compliment enough!
And kindness' self

Should pause before it wish me more such years.
'Twas fortunate that thus, ere youth escaped,
I tasted life's pure pleasure—one such, pure,
Is worth a thousand, mixed—and youth's for pleasure:
Mine is received; let my age pay for it.

Gau. So, pay, and pleasure paid for, thinks your
Grace,

Should never go together?

Gui. ————— *How, Sir Gaucelme?*

Hurry one's feast down unenjoyingly
At the snatched breathing-intervals of work?
As good you saved it till the dull day's-end
When, stiff and sleepy, appetite is gone!
Eat first, then work upon the strength of it!

The D. True: you enable me to risk my Future,
By giving me a Past beyond recall.

I lived, a girl, one happy leisure year:
Let me endeavour to be the Duchess now!
And so,—what news, Sir Guibert, spoke you of?

[*As they advance a little, and GUIBERT speaks*
—That gentleman?

Val. [*Aside.*] I feel her eyes on me!

Gui. [*to VALENCE.*] The Duchess, sir, inclines to hear
your suit!

Advance! He is from Cleves.

Val. [*coming forward.*] [*Aside.*] Their wrongs—their
wrongs!

The D. And you, sir, are from Cleves? How fresh
in mind,

The hour or two I passed at queenly Cleves!
She entertained me bravely, but the best
Of her good pageant seemed its standers-by,

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

With insuppressive joy on every face!

What says my ancient, famous, happy Cleves?

Val. Take the truth, lady—you are made for truth!

So think my friends: nor do they less deserve

The having you to take it, you shall think,

When you know all—nay, when you only know

How, on that day you recollect at Cleves,

When the poor acquiescing multitude

Who thrust themselves with all their woes apart

Into unnoticed corners, that the few

Their means sufficed to muster trappings for,

Might fill the foreground, occupy your sight

With joyous faces fit to bear away

And boast of as a sample of all Cleves

—How, when to daylight these crept out once more,

Clutching, unconscious, each his empty rags

Whence the scant coin, which had not half bought bread,

That morn he shook forth, counted piece by piece,

And, well-advisedly, on perfumes spent them

To burn, or flowers to strew, before your path

—How, when the golden flood of music and bliss

Ebbed, as their moon retreated, and again

Left the sharp black-point rocks of misery bare

—Then I, their friend, had only to suggest

“Saw she the horror as she saw the pomp!”—

And as one man they cried “He speaks the truth—

“Show her the horror! Take from our own mouths

“Our wrongs and show them, she will see them too!”

—This they cried, lady! I have brought the wrongs.

The D. Wrongs? Cleves has wrongs—apparent now and thus?

I thank you—in that paper?—Give it me!

Val. (There, Cleves!) In this! (What did I promise Cleves?)

Our weavers, clothiers, spinners are reduced

Since . . . Oh, I crave your pardon—I forget

I buy the privilege of this approach,

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

And promptly would discharge my debt. I lay
This paper humbly at the Duchess' feet!

[Presenting GUIBERT's paper.]

Gui. Stay—for the present . . .

The D.

Stay, sir? I take aught

That teaches me their wrongs with greater pride
Than this your Ducal circlet. Thank you, sir!

[The DUCHESS reads hastily; then, turning to the
Courtiers—

What have I done to you? Your deed or mine
Was it, this crowning me? I gave myself
No more a title to your homage, no,
Than church-flowers, born this season, wrote the
words

In the saint's-book that sanctified them first.
For such a flower, you plucked me—well, you erred—
Well, 'twas a weed—remove the eye-sore quick!
But should you not remember it has lain
Steeped in the candles' glory, palely shrined,
Nearer God's Mother than most earthly things?
—That if't be faded 'tis with prayer's sole breath—
That the one day it boasted was God's day?
Still, I do thank you—had you used respect
Here might I dwindle to my last white leaf,
Here lose life's latest freshness, which even yet
May yield some wandering insect rest and food:
So, fling me forth, and—all is best for all!

[After a pause.] Prince Berthold, who art Juliers'
Duke, it seems—

The King's choice, and the Emperor's, and the Pope's—
Be mine, too! Take this people! Tell not me
Of rescripts, precedents, authorities,
—But take them, from a heart that yearns to give!
Find out their love,—I could not; find their fear,—
I would not; find their like,—I never shall,
Among the flowers!

[Taking off her coronet.]

Colombe of Ravestein

Thanks God she is no longer Duchess here!

Val. [advancing to GUIBERT.] Sir Guibert,—knight,
they call you—this of mine

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Is the first step I ever set at court.

You dared make me your instrument, I find;

For that, so sure as you and I are men,

We reckon to the utmost presently :

But as you are a courtier and I none,

Your knowledge may instruct me. I, already,

Have too far outraged, by my ignorance

Of courtier-ways, this lady, to proceed

A second step and risk addressing her

—I am degraded—you, let me address !

Out of her presence, all is plain enough

What I shall do—but in her presence, too,

Surely there's something proper to be done !

[*To the others.*] You, gentles, tell me if I guess
aright—

May I not strike this man to earth ?

The Courtiers. [*as GUIBERT springs forward, with-
holding him.*] Let go !

—The Clothiers' spokesman, Guibert ? Grace a churl ?

The D. [*to VALENCE.*] Oh, be acquainted with your
party, sir !

He's of the oldest lineage Juliers boasts ;

A lion crests him for a cognisance ;

"Scorning to waver"—that's his scutcheon's word ;

His office with the new Duke—probably

The same in honour as with me ; or more,

By so much as this gallant turn deserves ;

He's now, I dare say, of a thousand times

The rank and influence that remain with her

Whose part you take ! So, lest for taking it

You suffer . . .

Val. I may strike him then to earth ?

Gui. [*falling on his knee.*] Great and dear lady,
pardon me ! Hear once !

Believe me and be merciful—be just !

I could not bring myself to give that paper

Without a keener pang than I dared meet

—And so felt Clugnet here, and Maufroy here

—No one dared meet it. Protestation's cheap,—

But, if to die for you did any good,

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

[To GAUCELME.] Would not I die, sir? Say your worst of me!

But it does no good, that's the mournful truth.

And since the hint of a resistance, even,

Would just precipitate, on you the first,

A speedier ruin—I shall not deny,

Saving myself indubitable pain,

I thought to give you pleasure (who might say?)

By showing that your only subject found

To carry the sad notice, was the man

Precisely ignorant of its contents;

A nameless, mere provincial advocate;

One whom 'twas like you never saw before,

Never would see again. All has gone wrong;

But I meant right, God knows, and you, I trust!

The D. A nameless advocate, this gentleman?—

—(I pardon you, Sir Guibert!)

Gui. [*rising, to VALENCE.*]—Sir, and you?—

Val. —Rejoice that you are lightened of a load.

Now, you have only me to reckon with!

The D. One I have never seen, much less obliged?—

Val. Dare I speak, lady?

The D. Dare you! Heard you not I rule no longer?

Val. Lady, if your rule

Were based alone on such a ground as these

[*Pointing to the Courtiers.*]

Could furnish you,—abjure it! They have hidden

A source of true dominion from your sight.

The D. You hear them—no such source is left . . .

Val. Hear Cleves!

Whose haggard craftsmen rose to starve this day,

Starve now, and will lie down at night to starve,

Sure of a like to-morrow—but as sure

Of a most unlike morrow-after-that,

Since end things must, end howsoe'er things may.

What curbs the brute-force instinct in its hour?

What makes, instead of rising, all as one,

And teaching fingers, so expert to wield

Their tool, the broadsword's play or carbine's trick,

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

—What makes that there's an easier help, they think,
For you, whose name so few of them can spell,
Whose face scarce one in every hundred saw,
You simply have to understand their wrongs,
And wrongs will vanish—so, still trades are plied,
And swords lie rusting, and myself stand here?
There is a vision in the heart of each
Of justice, mercy, wisdom; tenderness
To wrong and pain, and knowledge of its cure—
And these, embodied in a woman's form
That best transmits them, pure as first received,
From God above her, to mankind below.
Will you derive your rule from such a ground,
Or rather hold it by the suffrage, say,
Of this man—this—and this?

The D. [after a pause.] You come from Cleves—
How many are at Cleves of such a mind?

Val. [from his paper.] “We, all the manufacturers
of Cleves”—

The D. Or stay, sir—lest I seem too covetous—
Are you my subject? such as you describe
Am I to you—though to no other man?

Val. [from his paper.]—“Valence, ordained your
Advocate at Cleves”—

The D. [replacing the coronet.] Then I remain Cleves'
Duchess! Take you note,
While Cleves but yields one subject of this stamp,
I stand her lady till she waves me off!
For her sake, all the Prince claims I withhold;
Laugh at each menace; and, his power defying,
Return his missive with its due contempt!

[Casting it away.]

Gvi. [picking it up.]—Which to the Prince I will
deliver, Lady,

[Note it down, Gaucelme]—with your message too!

The D. I think the office is a subject's, sir!
—Either . . . how style you him?—my special guarder
The Marshal's—for who knows but violence
May follow the delivery!—Or, perhaps,
My Chancellor's—for law may be to urge

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

On its receipt!—Or, even my Chamberlain's—
For I may violate established form!

[*To VALENCE.*] Sir,—for the half hour till this service
ends,

Will you become all these to me?

Val. [*falling on his knee.*] My Liege!

The D. Give me!

[*The Courtiers present their badges of office.*

[*Putting them by.*]—Whatever was their virtue
once,

They need new consecration! [*raising VALENCE.*] Are
you mine?

—I will be Duchess yet! [*She retires.*

The Courtiers. Our Duchess yet!

A glorious lady! Worthy love and dread!

I'll stand by her,—and I, whate'er betide!

Gui. [*to VALENCE.*] Well done, well done, sir! I care
not who knows,

You have done nobly, and I envy you—

Tho' I am but unfairly used, I think:

For when one gets a place like this I hold,

One gets too the remark that its mere wages,

The pay and the preferment, make our prize—

Talk about zeal and faith apart from these,

We're laughed at—much would zeal and faith subsist

Without these also! Yet, let these be stopped,

Our wages discontinue,—then, indeed,

Our zeal and faith, we hear on every side,

Are not released—having been pledged away

I wonder with what zeal and faith in turn?

Hard money purchased me my place! No, no—

I'm right, sir—but your wrong is better still,

If I had time and skill to argue it.

Therefore, I say, I'll serve you, how you please—

If you like,—fight you, as you seem to wish—

(The kinder of me that, in sober truth,

I never dreamed I did you any harm)—

Gau. —Or, kinder still, you'll introduce, no doubt,

His merits to the Prince who's just at hand,

And let no hint drop he's made Chancellor,

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

And Chamberlain, and Heaven knows what beside!

Clug. [to VALENCE.] You stare, young sir, and threaten! Let me say,

That at your age, when first I came to court,
I was not much above a gentleman;

While now . . .

Val. —You are Head-Lackey? With your office
I have not yet been graced, sir!

Other Courtiers to Clug. Let him talk!

Fidelity—disinterestedness—

Excuse so much! Men claimed my worship ever

Who, stanch and steadfastly . . .

Enter ADOLF.

Adolf. The Prince arrives!

Courtiers. Ha? How?

Adolf. He leaves his guard a stage behind
At Aix, and enters almost by himself.

1st Court. The Prince! This foolish business puts
all out!

2nd Court. Let Gaucelme speak first!

3rd Court. Better I began
About the state of Juliers—should one say

All's prosperous and inviting him?

4th Court. —Or rather

All's prostrate and imploring him!

5th Court. That's best!

Where's the Cleves' paper, by the way?

4th Court. [to VALENCE.] Sir—sir—

If you'll but give that paper—trust it me,

I'll warrant . . .

5th Court. Softly, sir—the Marshal's duty!

Clug. Has not the Chamberlain a hearing first
By virtue of his patent?

Gau. Patents?—Duties?

All that, my masters, must begin again!

One word composes the whole controversy—

We're simply now—the Prince's!

The Others. Ay—the Prince's!

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Enter SABYNE.

Sab. Adolf! Bid . . . Oh, no time for ceremony!
Where's whom our lady calls her only subject?
She needs him! Who is here the Duchess's?

Val. [*starting from his reverie.*] Most gratefully I
follow to her feet!

ACT III

Afternoon. SCENE.—The Vestibule.

Enter PRINCE BERTHOLD and MELCHIOR.

Berth. A thriving little burgh this Juliers looks.
[*Half-apart.*] Keep Juliers, and as good you kept
Cologne:

Better try Aix, though!—

Mel. Please 't your Highness speak?

Berth. [*as before.*] Aix, Cologne, Frankfort,—Milan;
—Rome!—

Mel. —The Grave

—More weary seems your Highness, I remark,
Than sundry conquerors whose path I've watched
Through fire and blood to any prize they gain.
I could well wish you, for your proper sake,
Had met some shade of opposition here
—Found a blunt seneschal refuse unlock,
Or a scared usher lead your steps astray.
You must not look for next achievement's palm
So easy: this will hurt your conquering!

Berth. My next? Ay—as you say, my next and next!
Well, I am tired, that's truth, and moody too,
This quiet entrance-morning; listen why!
Our little burgh, now, Juliers—'tis indeed
One link, however insignificant,
Of the great chain by which I reach my hope—
—A link I must secure; but otherwise,
You'd wonder I esteem'd it worth my grasp.

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Just see what life is, with its shifts and turns !
It happens now—this very nook—to be
A place that once . . . but a short while since, neither—
When I lived an ambiguous hanger-on
Of foreign courts, and bore my claims about,
Discarded by one kinsman, and the other
A poor priest merely,—then, I say, this place
Shone my ambition's object ; to be Duke—
Seemed then what to be Emperor seems now.
My rights were far from being judged as plain
In those days as of late, I promise you—
And 'twas my day-dream, Lady Colombe here
Might e'en compound the matter, pity me,
Be struck, say, with my chivalry and grace
(I was a boy !)—bestow her hand at length,
And make me Duke, in her right if not mine.
Here am I, Duke confessed, at Juliers now !
Hearken : if ever I be Emperor,
Remind me what I felt and said to-day !

Mel. All this consoles a bookish man like me !
—And so will weariness cling to you ! Wrong—
Wrong ! Had you sought the Lady's court yourself,—
Faced the redoubtables composing it,
Flattered this, threatened that man, bribed the other,—
Pleaded, by writ and word and deed, your cause,—
Conquered a footing inch by painful inch,—
And, after long years' struggle, pounced at last
On her for prize,—the right life had been lived,
And justice done to divers faculties
Shut in that brow : yourself were visible
As you stood victor, then ! whom now—(your pardon !)
I am forced narrowly to search and see—
So are you hid by helps—this Pope, your uncle—
Your cousin, the other King ! You are a Mind,—
They, Body : too much of mere legs-and-arms
Obstructs the mind so ! Match these with their like—
Match mind with mind !

Berth. And where's your mind to match ?
They show me legs-and-arms to cope withal !
I'd subjugate this city—where's its mind ?

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

[*The Courtiers enter slowly.*

Mel. Got out of sight when you came troops and all!
And in its stead, here greets you flesh-and-blood—
A smug œconomy of both, this first!

[*As CLUGNET bows obsequiously.*

Well done, gout, all considered!—I may go?

Berth. Help me receive them!

Mel. Oh, they just will say

What yesterday at Aix their fellows said,—

At Treves, the day before!—Sir Prince, my friend,

Why do you let your life slip thus?—Mean time,

I have my little Juliers to achieve—

The understanding this tough Platonist,

Your holy uncle disinters, Amelius—

Lend me a company of horse and foot,

To help me through his tractate—gain my Duchy!

Berth. And Empire, after that is gained, will be—?

Mel. To help me through your uncle's comment,
Prince! [Goes.

Berth. Ah? Well! he o'er-refines—the scholar's fault!

How do I let my life slip? Say, this life,

I lead now, differs from the common life

Of other men in mere degree, not kind,

Of joys and griefs,—still there is such degrec—

Mere largeness in a life is something, sure,—

Enough to care about and struggle for,

In this world: for this world, the Size of things;

The Sort of things, for that to come, no doubt!

A great is better than a little aim—

And when I wooed Priscilla's rosy mouth

And failed so, under that grey convent-wall,

Was I more happy than I should be now

[*By this time, the Courtiers are ranged before him.*

If failing of my Empire? Not a whit!

—Here comes the Mind, it once had tasked me sore

To baffle, but for my advantages!

All's best as 'tis—these scholars talk and talk!

[*Seats himself.*

The Courtiers. Welcome our Prince to Juliers!—to
his Heritage!

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Our dutifullest service proffer we!

Clug. I, please your Highness, having exercised
The function of Grand Chamberlain at Court,
With much acceptance, as men testify . . .

Berth. I cannot greatly thank you, gentlemen!
The Pope declares my claim to the Duchy founded
On strictest justice; if you concede it, therefore,
I do not wonder—and the kings my friends
Protesting they will see such claim enforced,
You easily may offer to assist us.

But there's a slight discretionary power
To serve me in the matter, you've had long,
Though late you use it. This is well to say—
But could you not have said it months ago?
I'm not denied my own Duke's truncheon, true—
'Tis flung me—I stoop down, and from the ground
Pick it, with all you placid standers-by—
And now I have it, gems and mire at once.
Grace go with it to my soiled hands, you say!

Gui. (By Paul, the Advocate our doughty friend
Cuts the best figure!)

Gau. If our ignorance
May have offended, sure our loyalty . . .

Berth. Loyalty? Yours?—Oh—of yourselves you
speak!

—I mean the Duchess all this time, I hope!
And since I have been forced repeat my claims
As if they never had been made before,
As I began, so must I end, it seems.
The formal answer to the grave demand—
What says the lady?

Courtiers [one to another.] 1st Court. Marshal!
2nd Court. Orator!

Gui. A variation of our mistress' way!
Wipe off his boots' dust, Clugnet?—that, he waits!

1st Court. Your place!

2nd Court. Just now it was your own!

Gui. The devil's!

Berth. [to GUIBERT.] Come forward, friend—you
with the paper, there!

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Is Juliers the first city I've obtained?
By this time, I may boast proficiency
In each decorum of the circumstance!
Give it me as she gave it—the petition
(Demand, you style it)—what's required, in brief?
What title's reservation, appanage's
Allowance?—I heard all at Treves, last week!

Gau. [to GUIBERT.] “Give it him as she gave it!”

Gui. And why not?

[To BERTHOLD.] The lady crushed your summons thus
together,

And bade me, with the very greatest scorn
So fair a frame could hold, inform you . . .

Courtiers. Stop—

Idiot!—

Gui. . . . —Inform you she denied your claim,
Defied yourself! (I tread upon his heel,
The blustering Advocate!)

Berth. By heaven and earth!

Dare you jest, sir?

Gui. Did they at Treves, last week?

Berth. [starting up.] Why then, I look much bolder
than I knew,

And you prove better actors than I thought—

Since, as I live, I took you as you entered

For just so many dearest friends of mine,

Fled from the sinking to the rising power

—The sneaking'st crew, in short, I e'er despised!

Whereas, I am alone here for the moment—

With every soldier left behind at Aix!

Silence? That means the worst—I thought as much!

What follows next then?

Courtiers. Gracious Prince—he raves!

Gui. He asked the truth and why not get the
truth?

Berth. Am I a prisoner? Speak, will somebody?
—But why stand paltering with imbeciles?

Let me see her, or . . .

Gui. Her, without her leave,
Shall no one see—she's Duchess yet!

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Courtiers. [Footsteps without, as they are disputing.]

Good chance!

She's here—the Lady Colombe's self

Berth.

'Tis well!

[*Aside.*] Array a handful thus against my world?

Not ill done, truly! Were not this a mind

To match one's mind with? Colombe!—Let us wait!

I failed so, under that grey convent-wall!

She comes!

Gui. The Duchess! Strangers, range yourselves!

[*As the DUCHESS enters in conversation with
VALENCE, BERTHOLD and the Courtiers
fall back a little.*]

The D. Presagefully it beats, presagefully,
My heart—the right is Berthold's and not mine!

Val. Grant that he has the right, dare I mistrust
Your power to acquiesce so patiently
As you believe, in such a dream-like change
Of fortune—change abrupt, profound, complete?

The D. Ah, the first bitterness is over now!
Bitter I may have felt it to confront
The truth, and ascertain those natures' value
I had so counted on—that was a pang—
But I did bear it, and the worst is over:
Let the Prince take them!

Val. —And take Juliers too?
—Your People without crosses, wands, and chains—
Only with hearts?

The D. There I feel guilty, sir!
I cannot give up what I never had:
For these I ruled, not them—these stood between.
Shall I confess, sir? I have heard by stealth
Of Berthold from the first: more news and more;
Closer and closer swam the thunder-cloud,
But I was safely housed with these, I knew!
At times, when to the casement I would turn,
At a bird's passage or a flower-trail's play,
I caught the storm's red glimpses on its edge—
Yet I was sure some one of all these friends
Would interpose—I followed the bird's flight,

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Or plucked the flower—some one would interpose!

Val. Not one thought on the People—and Cleves there!

The D. So, sadly conscious my real sway was missed,

Its shadow goes without so much regret:

Else could I not again thus calmly bid you,

Answer Prince Berthold!

Val. Then you acquiesce?

The D. Remember over whom it was I ruled!

Gui. [stepping forward.] Prince Berthold, yonder, craves an audience, Lady!

The D. [to VALENCE]. I only have to turn, and I shall face

Prince Berthold! Oh, my very heart is sick!

It is the daughter of a line of Dukes,

This scornful insolent adventurer

Will bid depart from my dead father's halls

I shall not answer him—dispute with him—

But, as he bids, depart! Prevent it, sir!

Sir—but a mere day's respite! Urge for me

—What I shall call to mind I should have urged

When time's gone by—'twill all be mine, you urge!

A day—an hour—that I myself may lay

My rule down! 'Tis too sudden—must not be!

The world's to hear of it! Once done—for ever!

How will it read, sir? How be sung about?

Prevent it!

Berth. [approaching.] Your frank indignation, Lady, Cannot escape me! Overbold I seem—

But somewhat should be pardoned my surprise,

At this reception,—this defiance, rather.

And if, for their and your sakes, I rejoice

Your virtues could inspire a trusty few

To make such gallant stand in your behalf,

I cannot but be sorry, for my own,

Your friends should force me to retrace my steps,

Since I no longer am permitted speak

After the pleasant peaceful course prescribed

No less by courtesy than relationship

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Which, if you once forgot, I still remember :
But never must attack pass unrepelled.
Suffer, that through you, I demand of these,
Who controverts my claim to Juliers?

The D.

—Me,

You say, you do not speak to—

Berth.

Of your subjects

I ask, then: whom do you accredit? Where
Stand those should answer?

Val. [*advancing*].

The Lady is alone!

Berth. Alone, and thus? So weak and yet so bold?

Val. I said she was alone—

Berth.

—And weak, I said.

Val. When is man strong until he feels alone?

It was some lonely strength at first, be sure,
Created organs, such as those you seek,
By which to give its varied purpose shape—
And, naming the selected ministrants,
Took sword, and shield, and sceptre,—each, a man!
That strength performed its work and passed its way:
You see our Lady: there, the old shapes stand!
—A Marshal, Chamberlain, and Chancellor—
“Be helped their way, into their death put life
“And find advantage!”—so you counsel us:
But let strength feel alone, seek help itself,—
And, as the inland-hatched sea-creature hunts
The sea's breast out,—as, littered 'mid the waves,
The desert-brute makes for the desert's joy,
So turns our lady to her true resource,
Passing o'er hollow fictions, worn-out types,
—So, I am first her instinct fastens on!
And prompt I say, so clear as heart can speak,
The People will not have you; nor shall have!
It is not merely I shall go bring Cleves
And fight you to the last,—though that does much,
And men and children,—ay, and women too,
Fighting for home, are rather to be feared
Than mercenaries fighting for their pay—
But, say you beat us, since such things have been,
And, where this Juliers laughed, you set your foot

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Upon a streaming bloody splash—what then?
Stand you the more our Lord that there you stand?
Lord it o'er troops whose force you concentrate,
A pillared flame whereto all ardours tend—
Lord it 'mid priests whose schemes you amplify,
A cloud of smoke 'neath which all shadows brood—
But never, in this gentle spot of earth,
Can you become our Colombe, our play-queen,
For whom, to furnish lilies for her hair,
We'd pour our veins forth to enrich the soil!
—Our conqueror? Yes!—Our despot? Yes!—Our
Duke?

Know yourself, know us!

Berth. [*who has been in thought.*] Know your lady,
also!

[*Very deferentially.*]—To whom I needs must exculpate
myself

From having made a rash demand, at least.
Wherefore to you, sir, who appear to be
Her chief adviser, I submit my claims, [*Giving papers*
But, this step taken, take no further step,
Until the Duchess shall pronounce their worth.
Here be our meeting-place; at night, its time:
Till when I humbly take the Lady's leave!

[*He withdraws. As the DUCHESS turns to VALENCE,*
the Courtiers interchange glances and come for-
ward a little.

1st Court. So, this was their device!

2nd Court. No bad device!

3rd Court. You'd say they love each other, Guibert's
friend

From Cleves, and she, the Duchess!

4th Court. —And moreover,
That all Prince Berthold comes for, is to help
Their loves!

5th Court. Pray, Guibert, what is next to do?

Gui. [*advancing.*] I laid my office at the Duchess'
foot—

Others. And I—and I—and I!

The D. I took them, sirs!

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Gui. [*Apart to VALENCE.*] And now, sir, I am
simple knight again—

Guibert, of the great ancient house, as yet
That never bore affront : whate'er your birth,—
As things stand now, I recognise yourself
(If you'll accept experience of some date)
As like to be the leading man o' the time,
Therefore as much above me now, as I
Seemed above you this morning. Then, I offered
To fight you : will you be as generous
And now fight me ?

Val. Ask when my life is mine !

Gui. ('Tis hers now !)

Clug. [*Apart to VALENCE, as Guibert turns from him.*] You, sir, have insulted me

Grossly,—will grant me, too, the selfsame favour
You've granted him, just now, I make no question ?

Val. I promise you, as him, sir !

Clug. Do you so ?

Handsomely said ! I hold you to it, sir !

You'll get me reinstated in my office

As you will Guibert !

The D. I would be alone !

[*They begin to retire slowly : as VALENCE is about to follow—*

Alone, sir—only with my heart,—you stay !

Gau. You hear that ? Ah, light breaks upon me !

Cleves—

It was at Cleves some man harangued us all—
With great effect,—so those who listened said,
My thoughts being busy elsewhere : was this he ?
Guibert,—your strange, disinterested man !

Your uncorrupted, if uncourtly friend !

The modest worth you mean to patronise !

He cares about no Duchesses, not he—

His sole contest is with the wrongs of Cleves !

What, Guibert ? What, it breaks on you at last ?

Gui. Would this hall's floor were a mine's roof !—

I'd back

And in her very face . . .

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Gau. Apply the match
That fired the train,—and where would you be, pray?

Gui. With him!

Gau. Stand, rather, safe outside with me!
The mine's charged—shall I furnish you the match
And place you properly?—To the ante-chamber!

Gui. Can you?

Gau. Try me!—Your friend's in fortune!

Gui. Quick—
To the ante-chamber!—He is pale with bliss!

Gau. No wonder! Mark her eyes!

Gui. To the ante-chamber!
[*The Courtiers retire.*]

The D. Sir, could you know all you have done
for me

You were content! You spoke, and I am saved!

Val. Be not too sanguine, Lady! Ere you dream,
That transient flush of generosity
Fades off, perchance! The man, beside, is gone,—
Whom we might bend; but see the papers here—
Inalterably his requirement stays,
And cold hard words have we to deal with now.
In that large eye there seemed a latent pride,
To self-denial not incompetent,
But very like to hold itself dispensed
From such a grace—however, let us hope!
He is a noble spirit in noble form!
I wish he less had bent that brow to smile
As with the fancy how he could subject
Himself upon occasion to—himself!
From rudeness, violence, you rest secure;
But do not think your Duchy rescued yet!

The D. You,—who have opened a new world to me,
Will never take the faded language up
Of that I leave? My Duchy—keeping it,
Or losing it—is that my sole world now?

Val. Ill have I spoken if you thence despise
Juliers; although the lowest, on true grounds,
Be worth more than the highest rule, on false:
Aspire to rule, on the true grounds!

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

The D.

Nay, hear—

False, I will never—rash, I would not be!
This is indeed my Birthday—soul and body,
Its hours have done on me the work of years.
You hold the Requisition: ponder it!
If I have right— my duty's plain: if He—
Say so—nor ever change a tone of voice!
At night you meet the Prince—meet me at eve;
Till when, farewell! This discomposes you?
Believe in your own nature, and its force
Of renovating mine. I take my stand
Only as under me the earth is firm—
So, prove the first step stable, all will be!
That first, I choose—[*laying her hand on his.*—the
next to take, choose you! [*She withdraws.*

Val. [*after a pause.*] What drew down this on me!

On me—dead once—

She thus bids live,—since all I hitherto
Thought dead in me; youth's ardours and emprise,
Burst into life before her, as she bids
Who needs them!—Whither will this reach, where
end?

Her hand's print burns on mine . . . Yet she's above—
So very far above me! All's too plain—
I served her when the others sank away,
And she rewards me as such souls reward—
The changed voice, the suffusion of the cheek,
The eye's acceptance, the expressive hand—
—Reward, that's little, in her generous thought,
Though all to me . . .

I cannot so disclaim

Heaven's gift, nor call it other than it is!

She loves me!

[*Looking at the Prince's papers.*—Which love, these,
perchance, forbid!

Can I decide against myself—pronounce

She is the Duchess and no mate for me?

—Cleves, help me! Teach me,—every haggard face,—

To sorrow and endure! I will do right

Whatever be the issue—help me, Cleves!

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

ACT IV

Evening. SCENE.—An Ante-chamber.

Enter the Courtiers.

Mau. Now then, that we may speak—how spring
this mine?

Gau. Is Guibert ready for its match? He cools!
Not so friend Valence with the Duchess there!
“Stay, Valence—are not you my better self?”
And her cheek mantled—

Gui. Well, she loves him, sir—
And more,—since you will have it I grow cool,—
She's right: he's worth it.

Gau. For his deeds to-day?
Say so!

Gui. What should I say beside?

Gau. Not this—
For friendship's sake leave this for me to say—
That we're the dupes of an egregious cheat!
This plain, unpractised suitor, who found way
To the Duchess thro' the merest die's turn-up—
A year ago, had seen her and been seen,
Loved and been loved—

Gui. Impossible!

Gau. —Nor say,
How sly and exquisite a trick, moreover,
Was this which—taking not their stand on facts
Boldly, for that had been endurable,
But, worming in their way by craft, they choose
Resort to, rather,—and which you and we,
Sheep-like, assist them in the playing off!
The Duchess thus parades him as preferred,
Not on the honest ground of preference,
Seeing first, liking more, and there an end—
But as we all had started equally,
And at the close of a fair race he proved
The only valiant, sage, and loyal man.

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

And she, too, with the pretty fits and starts,—
The careless, winning, candid ignorance
Of what the Prince might challenge or forego—
She had a hero in reserve! What risk
Ran she? This deferential easy Prince
Who brings his claims for her to ratify
—He's just her puppet for the nonce! You'll see,—
Valence pronounces, as is equitable,
Against him: off goes the confederate:
As equitably, Valence takes her hand!

The Chancellor. You run too fast—her hand, no
subject takes!

Do not our Archives hold her father's Will?
That will provides against such accident,
And gives next heir, Prince Berthold, the reversion
Of Juliers, which she forfeits, wedding so.

Gau. I know that, well as you,—but does the Prince?
Knows Berthold, think you, that this plan, he helps,
For Valence's ennoblement,—would end,
If crowned with the success which seems its due,
In making him the very thing he plays,
The actual Duke of Juliers? All agree
That Colombe's title waived or set aside,
He is next heir.

The Chan. Incontrovertibly!

Gau. Guibert, your match, now, to the train!

Gui. Enough!

I'm with you—selfishness is best again!
I thought of turning honest—what a dream!
Let's wake now!

Gau. Selfish, friend, you never were—
'Twas but a series of revenges taken
On your unselfishness for prospering ill.
But now that you're grown wiser, what's our course?

Gui. —Wait, I suppose, till Valence weds our Lady,
And then, if we must needs revenge ourselves,
Apprise the Prince—

Gau. —The Prince, ere then dismissed
With thanks for playing his mock part so well?
Tell the Prince now, sir! Ay, this very night—

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Ere he accepts his dole and goes his way,
Explain how such a marriage makes him Duke,
Then trust his gratitude for the surprise!

Gui. —Our Lady wedding Valence all the same
As if the penalty were undisclosed!

Good! If she loves, she'll not disown her love,
Throw Valence up—I wonder you see that!

Gau. The shame of it—the suddenness and shame!
Within her, the inclining heart—without,
A terrible array of witnesses—

With Valence by, to keep her to her word,
And Berthold's indignation or disgust—
We'll try it!—Not that we can venture much;
Her confidence we've lost for ever— Berthold's
Is all to gain!

Gui. To-night, then, venture we!
Yet—if lost confidence might be renewed?

Gau. Never in noble natures! With the base ones,—
Twist off the crab's claw, wait a smarting-while,
And something grows and grows and gets to be
A mimic of the lost joint, just so like
As keeps in mind it never, never will
Replace its predecessor! Crabs do that:
But lop the Lion's foot—and

Gui. To the Prince!

Gau. [*Aside.*] And come what will to the lion's foot,
I pay you

My cat's-paw, as I long have yearned to pay!

[*Aloud.*] Footsteps . . . Himself! 'Tis Valence breaks
on us!

Exulting that their scheme succeeds!—We'll hence—
And perfect ours! Consult the Archives, first—
Then, fortified with knowledge, seek the Hall!

Clug. [*to GAUCELME as they retire.*] You have not
smiled so since your father died!

As they retire, enter VALENCE with papers.

Val. So must it be! I have examined these
With scarce a palpitating heart—so calm,

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Keeping her image almost wholly off,
Setting upon myself determined watch,
Repelling to the uttermost his claims,
And the result is . . . all men would pronounce
Am not I, only, the result to be—
Berthold is Heir; she has no shade of right
To the distinction which divided us,
But, suffered to rule first I know not why,
Her rule connived at by those Kings and Popes,
To serve some devil's-purpose,—now 'tis gained,
Whate'er it was, the rule expires as well.
—Valence, this rupture . . . selfish can it be?
Eject it from your heart, her home!—It stays!
Ah, the brave world that opens on us both!
. . . Do my poor townsmen so esteem it? Cleves,—
I need not your pale faces! This, reward
For service done to you? Too horrible!
I never served you—'twas myself I served!
Nay—served not—rather saved from punishment
Which, had I failed you then, would plague me now!
My life continues yours, and your life, mine—
But if, to take God's gift, I swerve no step—
Cleves!—if I breathe no prayer for it—if she,
[Footsteps without.
Colombe, that comes now, freely gives herself—
Will Cleves require, that, turning thus to her,
I . . .

Enter PRINCE BERTHOLD.

—Pardon, sir,—I did not look for you
Till night, in the Hall; nor have as yet declared
My judgment to the Lady!

Berth. . . . So I hoped.

Val. And yet I scarcely know why that should
check

The frank disclosure of it first to you—
What her right seems, and what, in consequence,
She will decide on—

Berth. . . . That I need not ask,

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Val. You need not : I have proved the Lady's mind—
And, justice being to do, dare act for her.

Berth. Doubtless she has a very noble mind !

Val. Oh, never fear but she'll in each conjuncture
Bear herself bravely ; she no whit depends
On circumstance ; as she adorns a throne,
She had adorned . . .

Berth. . . . A cottage—in what book
Have I read that, of every queen that lived ?
A throne ? You have not been instructed, sure,
To forestall my request ?

Val. 'Tis granted, sir—
My heart instructs me. I have scrutinized
Your claims . . .

Berth. Ah—claims, you mean, at first preferred !
I come, before the hour appointed me,
To pray you let those claims at present rest—
In favour of a new and stronger one.

Val. You shall not need a stronger : on the part
Of the lady, all you offer I accept,
Since one clear right suffices : yours is clear.
Propose !

Berth. I offer her my hand.

Val. Your hand ?

Berth. A Duke's, yourself say ; and, at no far time,
Something here whispers me—the Emperor's.
The Lady's mind is noble ; which induced
This seizure of occasion ere my claims
Were—settled, let us amicably say !

Val. Your hand !

Berth. (He will fall down and kiss it next !)
Sir, this astonishment's too flattering—
Nor must you hold your mistress' worth so cheap !
Enhance it, rather,—urge that blood is blood—
The daughter of the Burgraves, Landgraves, Markgraves,
Remains their daughter ; I shall scarce gainsay !
Elsewhere or here, the Lady needs must rule :
Like the Imperial crown's great chrysoprase,
They talk of—somewhat out of keeping there,
And yet no jewel for a meaner cap !

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Val. You wed the Duchess?

Berth. Cry you mercy, friend!

Will the match influence many fortunes here?

A natural solicitude enough!

Be certain, no bad chance it proves for you!

However high you take your present stand,

There's prospect of a higher still remove—

For Juliers will not be my resting-place,

And, when I have to choose a substitute

To rule the little burgh, I'll think of you.

You need not give your mates a character!

And yet I doubt your fitness to supplant

The grey smooth Chamberlain—he'd hesitate

A doubt his lady could demean herself

So low as to accept me. Courage, sir!

I like your method better—feeling's play

Is franker much, and flatters me beside.

Val. I am to say, you love her?

Berth. Say that too!

Love has no great concernment, thinks the world,

With a Duke's marriage—How go precedents

In Juliers' story—how use Juliers' Dukes?

I see you have them here in goodly row;

(Yon must be Luitpold,—ay, a stalwart sire!)

—Say, I have been arrested suddenly

In my ambition's course, its rocky course,

By this sweet flower—I fain would gather it

And then proceed—so say and speedily—

—(Nor stand there like Duke Luitpold's brazen self!)

Enough, sir: you possess my mind, I think.

This is my claim, the others being withdrawn,

And to this, be it that, in the Hall to-night,

Your Lady's answer comes; till when, farewell!

[He retires.]

Val. *[after a pause.]* The heavens and earth stay as
they were—my heart

Beats as it beat—the truth remains the truth!

What falls away, then, if not faith in her?

Was it my faith, that she could estimate

Love's value,—and, such faith still guiding me,

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Dare I now test her?—or grew faith so strong
Solely because no power of test was mine?

Enter the DUCHESS.

The D. My fate, sir! Ah, you turn away—all's
over!

But you are sorry for me—be not so!
What I might have become, and never was,
Regret with me; what I have merely been,
Rejoice I am no longer; what I seem
Beginning now, in my new state, to be,
Hope that I am,—for, once my rights proved void,
This heavy roof seems easy to exchange
For the blue sky outside—my lot henceforth!

Val. And what a lot is Berthold's!

The D. How of him?

Val. He gathers earth's whole good into his arms,
Standing, as man, now, stately, strong and wise—
Marching to fortune, not surprised by her:
One great aim, like a guiding-star, above—
Which tasks strength, wisdom, stateliness, to lift
His manhood to the height that takes the prize;
A prize not near—lest overlooking earth
He rashly spring to seize it—nor remote,
So that he rests upon his path content:
But day by day, while shimmering grows shine,
And the faint circlet prophesies the orb,
He sees so much as, just evolving these,
The stateliness, the wisdom and the strength,
To due completion, will suffice this life,
And lead him at his grandest to the grave.
After this star, out of a night he springs;
A beggar's cradle for the throne of thrones
He quits, so, mounting, feels each step he mounts,
Nor, as from each to each exultingly
He passes, overleaps one grade of joy.
This, for his own good:—with the world, each gift
Of God and man,—Reality, Tradition,
Fancy and Fact—so well environ him,

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

That as a mystic panoply they serve—
Of force, untenanted, to awe mankind,
And work his purpose out with half the world,
While he, their master, dexterously slipt
From such encumbrance, is meantime employed
With his own prowess on the other half.
Thus shall he prosper, every day's success
Adding, to what is He, a solid strength—
An æry might to what encircles him,
Till at the last, so life's routine lends help,
That as the Emperor only breathes and moves,
His shadow shall be watched, his step or stalk
Become a comfort or a portent; how
He trails his ermine take significance,—
Till even his power shall cease to be most power,
And men shall dread his weakness more, nor dare
Peril their earth its bravest, first and best,
Its typified invincibility.

So shall he go on, greatening, till he ends
The man of men, the spirit of all flesh,
The fiery centre of an earthy world!

The D. Some such a fortune I had dreamed should rise
Out of my own—that is, above my power
Seemed other, greater potencies to stretch—

Val. For you?

The D. It was not I moved there, I think:
But one I could,—though constantly beside,
And aye approaching,—still keep distant from,
And so adore. 'Twas a man moved there!

Val. Who?

The D. I felt the spirit, never saw the face!

Val. See it! 'Tis Berthold's! He enables you
To realise your vision!

The D. Berthold?

Val. Duke—
Emperor to be: he proffers you his hand.

The D. Generous and princely!

Val. He is all of this.

The D. Thanks, Berthold, for my father's sake—no
hand

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Degrades me!

Val. You accept the proffered hand?

The D. That he should love me!

Val. "Loved" I did not say!

Had that been—love might so incline the Prince
To the world's good, the world that's at his foot,—
I do not know, this moment, I should dare
Desire that you refused the world—and Cleves—
The sacrifice he asks!

The D. Not love me, sir?

Val. He scarce affirmed it.

The D. May not deeds affirm?

Val. What does he? . . . Yes—yes—very much he
does!

All the shame saved, he thinks, and sorrow saved—
Immitigable sorrow, so he thinks,—
Sorrow that's deeper than we dream, perchance!

The D. Is not this love?

Val. So very much he does!

For look, you can descend now gracefully—
All doubts are banished, that the world might have,
Or worst, the doubts yourself, in after-time,
May call up of your heart's sincereness now:
To such, reply, "I could have kept my rule—
"Increased it to the utmost of my dreams—
"Yet I abjured it!" This, he does for you:
It is munificently much!

The D. Still "much!"

But why is it not love, sir? Answer me!

Val. Because not one of Berthold's words and looks
Had gone with love's presentment of a flower
To the beloved: because bold confidence,
Open superiority, free pride—
Love owns not, yet were all that Berthold owned:
Because where reason, even, finds no flaw,
Unerringly a lover's instinct may.

The D. You reason, then, and doubt?

Val. I love, and know.

The D. You love?—How strange! I never cast a
thought

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

On that! Just see our selfishness—you seemed
So much my own . . . I had no ground—and yet,
I never dreamed another might divide
My power with you, much less exceed it!

Val.

Lady,

I am yours wholly!

The D.

Oh, no, no, not mine!

'Tis not the same now, never more can be!

—Your first love, doubtless! Well, what's gone from
me?

What have I lost in you?

Val.

My heart replies—

No loss there! . . . So to Berthold back again!

This offer of his hand, he bids me make—

Its obvious magnitude is well to weigh!

The D. She's . . . yes, she must be very fair for
you!

Val. I am a simple Advocate of Cleves.

The D. You! With the heart and brain that so
helped me,

I fancied them exclusively my own,

Yet find are subject to a stronger sway!

She must be . . . tell me, is she very fair?

Val. Most fair, beyond conception or belief!

The D. Black eyes?—no matter! Colombe, the
world leads

Its life without you, whom your friends professed

The only woman—see how true they spoke!

One lived this while, who never saw your face,

Nor heard your voice—unless. . . . Is she from Cleves?

Val. Cleves knows her well!

The D.

Ah—just a fancy, now!

When you poured forth the wrongs of Cleves,—I said,

—Thought, that is, afterward . . .

Val.

You thought of me?

The D. Of what else? Only such great cause, I
thought,

For such effect—see what true love can do!

Cleves is his love!—I almost fear to ask

. . . Nor will not! This is idling—to our work!

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Admit before the Prince, without reserve,
My claims misgrounded; then may follow better
. . . When you poured out Cleves' wrongs impetuously,
Was she in your mind?

Val. All done was done for her—
--To humble me!

The D. She will be proud at least!

Val. She?

The D. When you tell her!

Val. That will never be!

The D. How—are there sweeter things you hope to
tell?

No, sir! You counselled me,—I counsel you
In the one point I—any woman—can!
Your worth, the first thing; let her own come next—
Say what you did through her, and she through you—
The praises of her beauty afterward!
Will you?

Val. I dare not!

The D. Dare not?

Val. She I love

Suspects not such a love in me.

The D. You jest!

Val. The lady is above me and away!
Not only the brave form, and the bright mind,
And the great heart, combine to press me low—
But all the world calls rank divides us.

The D. Rank?

Now grant me patience! Here's a man declares
Oracularly in another's case—
Sees the true value and the false, for them—
Nay, bids them see it, and they straight do see!
You called my court's love worthless—so it turned:
I threw away as dross my heap of wealth,
And here you stickle for a piece or two!
First—has she seen you?

Val. Yes!

The D. She loves you, then.

Val. One flash of hope burst—then succeeded
night—

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

And all's at darkest now. Impossible!

The D. We'll try: you are—so to speak—my subject yet?

Val. As ever—to the death!

The D. Obey me, then!

Val. I must!

The D. Approach her, and . . . No! First of all Get more assurance; "my instructress," say, "Was great, descended from a line of kings, "And even fair"—(wait why I say this folly)— "She said, of all men, none for eloquence, "Courage, and (what cast even these to shade) "The heart they sprung from,—none deserved like him "Who saved her at her need—if she said this, "What should not one I love, say?"

Val. Heaven—this hope—
Oh, lady, you are filling me with fire!

The D. Say this!—nor think I bid you cast aside
One touch of all that awe and reverence!
Nay—make her proud for once to heart's content
That all this wealth of heart and soul's her own!
Think you are all of this,—and, thinking it,
. . . (Obey!)

Val. I cannot choose!

The D. Then, kneel to her!
[VALENCE *sinks on his knee.*

I dream!

Val. Have mercy! Yours, unto the death,—
I have obeyed. Despise, and let me die.

The D. Alas, sir, is it to be ever thus?
Even with you as with the world? I know
This morning's service was no vulgar deed
Whose motive, once it dares avow itself,
Explains all done and infinitely more,
So takes the shelter of a nobler cause.
Your service named its true source,—loyalty!
The rest's unsaid again. The Duchess bids you,
Rise, sir! The Prince's words were in debate.

Val. [*rising.*] Rise! Truth, as ever, Lady, comes
from you!

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

I should rise—I that spoke for Cleves, can speak
For Man—yet tremble now, that stood firm then!
I laughed—for 'twas past tears—that Cleves should
starve

With all hearts beating loud the infamy,
And no tongue daring trust as much to air!
Yet here, where all hearts speak, shall I be mute?
Oh lady, for your own sake look on me!
On all I am, and have, and do—heart, brain,
Body and soul,—this Valence and his gifts!
I was proud once—I saw you—and they sank,
So that each magnified a thousand times
Were nothing to you—but such nothingness
Would a crown gild it, or a sceptre prop,
A treasure speed, a laurel-wreath enhance?
What is my own desert? But should your love
Have . . . there's no language helps here . . . singled me,—
Then—Oh, that wild word “then!”—be just to love,
In generosity its attribute!
Love, since you pleased to love! All's cleared—a stage
For trial of the question kept so long
For you—Is Love or Vanity the best?
You, solve it for the world's sake—you, speak first
What all will shout one day—you, vindicate
Our earth and be its angel! All is said.
Lady, I offer nothing—I am yours,
But for the cause' sake, look on me and him
And speak!

The D. I have received the Prince's message:
Say, I prepare my answer!

Val. Take me, Cleves!

[He withdraws.]

The D. Mournful—that nothing's what it calls itself!
Devotion, zeal, faith, loyalty—mere love!
And, love in question, what may Berthold's be?
I did ill to mistrust the world so soon—
Already was this Berthold at my side!
The valley-level has its hawks, no doubt:
May not the rock-top have its eagles, too?
Yet Valence . . . let me see his Rival then!

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

ACT V

Night. SCENE.—The Hall.

Enter BERTHOLD and MELCHIOR.

Mel. And here you wait the matter's issue?

Berth. Here.

Mel. I don't regret I shut Amelius, then!
But tell me, on this grand disclosure,—how
Behaved our spokesman with the forehead?

Berth. Oh,

Turned out no better than the foreheadless—
Was dazzled not so very soon—that's all!
For my part, this is scarce the hasty, showy,
Chivalrous measure you give me credit of!
Perhaps I had the fancy,—but 'tis gone—
—Let her commence the unfriended innocent,
And carry wrongs about from court to court?
No, truly! The least shake of Fortune's sand,
—My uncle-Pope chokes in a coughing-fit,
King Philip takes a fancy to blue eyes,—
And wondrously her claims would brighten up!
Forth comes a new gloss on the ancient law,
O'er-looked provisoes, past o'er premises,
Follow in plenty—No—'tis the safer step.
The hour beneath the convent-wall is lost—
Juliers and she, once mine, are ever mine.

Mel. Which is to say, you, losing heart already,
Elude the adventure!

Berth. Not so—or, if so—
Why not confess at once, that I advise
None of our kingly craft and guild just now
To lay, one moment, down their privilege
With the notion they can any time at pleasure
Retake it—that may turn out hazardous!
We seem, in Europe, pretty well at end
O' the night, with our great masque: those favoured few
Who keep the chamber's top, and honour's chance

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Of the early evening, may retain their place
And figure as they list till out of breath.
But it is growing late; and I observe
A dim grim kind of tipstaves at the doorway
Not only bar new-comers entering now,
But caution those who left, for any cause,
And would return, that morning draws too near;
The ball must die off, shut itself up. We—
I think, may dance lights out and sunshine in,
And sleep off headache on our frippery—
But friend the other, who cunningly stole out,
And, after breathing the fresh air outside,
Means to re-enter with a new costume,
Will be advised go back to bed, I fear.
I stick to privilege, on second thoughts!

Mel. Yes—you evade the adventure!—And, beside,
Give yourself out for colder than you are.
—King Philip, only, notes the lady's eyes?
Don't they come in for somewhat of the motive
With you too?

Berth. Yes—no: I am past that now!
Gone 'tis—I cannot shut my eyes to fact.
Of course, I might by forethought and contrivance
Reason myself into a rapture. Gone!
And something better's come instead, no doubt.

Mel. So be it! Yet, all the same, proceed my way,
Though to your end; so shall you prosper best.
The lady,—to be won for selfish ends,—
Will be won easier my unselfish . . . call it,
Romantic way.

Berth. Won easier?

Mel. Will not she?

Berth. There I profess humility without bound!
Ill cannot speed—not I—the Emperor!

Mel. And I should think the Emperor best waived,
From your description of her mood and way!
You could look, if it pleased you, into hearts;
But are too indolent and fond of watching
Your own—you know that, for you study it!

Berth. Had you but seen the orator her friend,

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

So bold and voluble an hour before,
Abashed to earth at aspect of the change!
Make her an Empress? Ah, that changed the case!
. . . Oh, I read hearts! And for my own behoof,
I court her with my true worth—see the event!
I learned my final lesson on that head
When years ago,—my first and last essay!
Before my uncle could obtain the ear
Of his superior, help me from the dirt—
Priscilla left me for a Brabant Duke
Whose cheek was like the topaz on his thumb.
I am past illusion on that score.

Mel.

Here comes

The lady—

Berth. —And there you go! But do not! Give me
Another chance to please you. Hear me plead!

Mel. You'll keep, then, to the lover, to the man?

*Enter the DUCHESS—followed by ADOLF and SABYNE,
and, after an interval, by the Courtiers.*

Berth. Good auspice to our meeting!

The D.

May it prove!

—And you, sir, will be Emperor one day?

Berth. (Ay—that's the point!) I may be Emperor.

The D. 'Tis not for my sake only, I am proud

Of this you offer: I am prouder far

That from the highest state should duly spring

The highest, since most generous, of deeds.

Berth. (Generous—still that!) You underrate your-
self.

You are, what I, to be complete, must have—

Find now, and may not find, another time.

While I career on all the world for stage,

There needs at home my representative—

The D. —Such, rather, would some warrior-woman
be—

One dowered with lands and gold, or rich in friends—

One like yourself!

Berth.

Lady, I am myself,

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

And have all these: I want what's not myself,
Nor has all these. Why give one hand two swords?
Here's one already: be a friend's next gift
A silk glove, if you will—I have a sword!

The D. You love me, then?

Berth. Your lineage I revere—
Honour your virtue, in your truth believe,
Do homage to your intellect, and bow
Before your peerless beauty.

The D. But, for love—

Berth. A further love I do not understand.
Our best course is to say these hideous truths,
And see them, once said, grow endurable.
Like waters shuddering from their central bed,
Black with the midnight bowels of the earth,
That, once up-spouted by an earthquake's throe,
A portent and a terror—soon subside,
Freshen apace, take gold and rainbow hues
In sunshine, sleep in shadow,—and, at last,
Grow common to the earth as hills or trees—
Accepted by all things they came to scare.

The D. You cannot love, then?

Berth. —Charlemagne, perhaps!
Are you not over-curious in love-lore?

The D. I have become so, very recently.
It seems, then, I shall best deserve esteem,
Respect, and all your candour promises,
By putting on a calculating mood—
Asking the terms of my becoming yours?

Berth. Let me not do myself injustice, neither!
Because I will not condescend to fictions
That promise what my soul can ne'er acquit.
It does not follow that my guarded phrase
May not include far more of what you seek,
Than wide professions of less scrupulous men.
You will be Empress, once for all—with me
The Pope disputes supremacy—you stand
And none gainsays, the Earth's first woman!

The D. That—
Or simple Lady of Ravestein again?

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Berth. The matter's not in my arbitrement!
Now I have made my claims—which I regret—
Cede one, cede all!

The D. This claim then, you enforce?

Berth. The world looks on.

The D. And when must I decide?

Berth. "When," Lady? Have I said thus much so promptly

For nothing? Poured out, with such pains, at once
What I might else have suffered to ooze forth
Droplet by droplet in a life-time long,
For aught less than as prompt an answer, too?
All's fairly told now—who can teach you more?

The D. I do not see him!

Berth. I shall ne'er deceive!

This offer has been made befittingly
Would time allow the better setting forth
The good of it, with what is not so good,
Advantage, and disparagement as well—
But as it is, the sum of both must serve.
I am already weary of this place—
My thoughts are next stage on to Rome. Decide!
The Empire—or,—not even Juliers now!
Hail to the Empress—farewell to the Duchess!

[*The Courtiers, who have been drawing nearer and nearer, interpose.*

Courtiers. . . . "Farewell," Prince? when we break in at our risk—

Clug. (Almost upon Court-licence trespassing)—

Courtiers.—To point out how your claims are valid yet!

You know not, by the Duke her Father's will,
The lady, if she weds beneath her rank,
Forfeits her Duchy in the next heir's favour—
So 'tis expressly stipulate. And if
It can be shown 'tis her intent to wed
A subject, then yourself, next heir, by right
Succeed to Juliers.

Berth. What insanity? . . .

Gui. Sir, there's one Valence—the pale fiery man

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

You saw and heard, this morning—thought, no doubt,
Was of considerable standing here—
I put it to your penetration, Prince,
If aught save love, the truest love for her,
Had made him serve the lady as he did!
He's simply a poor advocate of Cleves
—Creeps here with difficulty, finds a place
With danger, gets in by a miracle,
And for the first time meets the Lady's face—
So runs the story—is that credible?
For, first—no sooner in, than he's apprised
Fortunes have changed; you are all-powerful here,
The Lady as powerles: he stands fast by her!

The D. [Aside.] (And do such deeds spring up from
love alone?)

Gui. But here occurs the question, does the Lady
Love him again? I say, How else can she?
Can she forget how he stood singly forth
In her defence, dared outrage all of us,
Insult yourself—for what save love's reward?

The D. (And is love then the sole reward of love?)

Gui. But, love him as she may and must—you ask,
Means she to wed him? “Yes,” both natures answer!
Both, in their pride, point out the sole result—
Nought less would he accept nor she propose!
For each conjecture was she great enough—
—Will be, for this!

Clug. Though, now that this is known,
Policy, doubtless, urges she deny . . .

The D. —What, sir, and wherefore?—since I am not
sure

That all is any other than you say?
You take this Valence, hold him close to me,
Him with his actions: can I choose but look?
I am not sure, love trulier shows itself
Than in this man, you hate and would degrade,
Yet, with your worst abatement, show me thus:
Nor am I—(thus made look within myself,
Ere I had dared,)—now that the look is dared—
Sure that I do not love him!

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Gui. Hear you, Prince?

Berth. And what, sirs, please you, may this prattle mean?

—Unless to prove with what alacrity
You give your Lady's secrets to the world—
—How much indebted, for discovering
That quality, you make me, will be found
When next a keeper for my own's to seek!

Courtiers. "Our Lady?"

Berth. —She assuredly remains!

The D. Ah, Prince—and you too can be generous?
You could renounce your power, if this were so,
And let me, as these phrase it, wed my love
Yet keep my Duchy? You perhaps exceed
Him, even, in disinterestedness!

Berth. How, Lady, should all this affect my purpose?
Your will and choice are still as ever, free!
Say, you have known a worthier than myself
In mind and heart, of happier form and face;
Others must have their birthright! I have gifts,
To balance theirs, not blot them out of sight!
Against a hundred other qualities,
I lay the prize I offer. I am nothing—
Wed you the Empire?

The D. And my heart away?

Berth. When have I made pretension to your heart?
I give none. I shall keep your honour safe—
With mine I trust you, as the sculptor trusts
Yon marble woman with the marble rose,
Loose on her hand, she never will let fall,
In graceful, slight, silent security.
You will be proud of my world-wide career,
And I content in you the fair and good.
What were the use of planting a few seeds,
The thankless climate never would mature—
Affections all repelled by circumstance?
Enough: to these no credit I attach,—
To what you own, find nothing to object.
Write simply on my Requisition's face
What shall content my friends—that you admit,

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

As Colombe of Ravestein, the claims therein,
Or never need admit them, as my wife—
And either way, all's ended.

The D. Let all end!

Berth. The Requisition!

Courtiers. —Valence holds, of course!

Berth. Desire his presence! [ADOLF goes out.]

Courtiers. [to each other.] Out it all comes yet!

He'll have his word against the bargain still!

He's not the man to tamely acquiesce!

One passionate appeal—upbraiding even,

Might turn the tide again! Despair not yet!

[*They retire a little.*]

Berth. [to MELCHIOR.] The Empire has its old success, my friend!

Mel. You've had your way: before the spokesman comes,

Let me, but this once, work a problem out,

And ever more be dumb! The Empire wins?

To better purpose I have read my books!

Enter VALENCE.

Mel. [to the Courtiers.] Apart, my masters!

[To VALENCE.] Sir, one word with you!

I am a poor dependent of the Prince's—

Pitched on to speak, as of slight consequence:

You are no higher, I find—in other words,

We two, as probably the wisest here,

Need not hold diplomatic talk like fools:

Suppose I speak, divesting the plain fact

Of all their tortuous phrases, fit for them—

Do you reply so, and what trouble's saved!

The Prince, then—an embroiled strange heap of news

This moment reaches him—if true or false,

All dignity forbids he should enquire

In person, or by worthier deputy;

Yet somehow must enquire, lest slander come:

And so 'tis I am pitched on. You have heard

His offer to your Lady?

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Val. Yes.

Mel. —Conceive

Her joy thereat?—

Val. I cannot.

Mel. No one can:

All draws to a conclusion, therefore.

Val. [*Aside.*] So!

No after-judgment—no first thought revised—

Her first and last decision!—me, she leaves—

Takes him—a simple heart is flung aside,

The ermine o'er a heartless breast embraced!

Oh Heaven, this mockery has been played too oft!

Once, to surprise the angels—twice, that fiends

Recording, might be proud they chose not so—

Thrice, many thousand times, to teach the world

All men should pause, misdoubt their strength, since
men

Could have such chance yet fail so signally,

—But ever—ever—this farewell to heaven,

Welcome to earth—this taking death for life—

This spurning love and kneeling to the world—

Oh Heaven, it is too often and too old!

Mel. Well, on this point—what but an absurd
rumour

Arises—these, its source—its subject, you!

Your faith and loyalty misconstruing,

They say, your service claims the lady's hand!

Of course, nor Prince nor Lady can respond—

Yet something must be said—for, were it true

You made such claim, the Prince would . . .

Val. Well, sir, would?

Mel. —Not only probably withdraw his suit,

But, very like, the lady might be forced

Accept your own.—Oh, there are reasons why!

But you'll excuse at present all save this,—

I think so. What we want is, your own witness,

For, or against—her good, or yours: decide!

Val. [*Aside.*] Be it her good if she accounts it so!

[*After a contest.*] For what am I but hers, to choose
as she?

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Who knows how far, beside, the light from her
May reach, and dwell with, what she looks upon?

Mel. [to the Prince.] Now to him, you!

Berth. [to VALENCE.] My friend acquaints you, sir,
The noise runs . . .

Val. . . . Prince, how fortunate are you,
Wedding her as you will, in spite of it,
To show belief in love! Let her but love you,
All else you disregard! What else can be?
You know how love is incompatible
With falsehood—purifies, assimilates
All other passions to itself.

Mel. Ay, sir :
But softly! Where in the object we select,
Such love is, perchance, wanting?

Val. Then, indeed,
What is it you can take?

Mel. Nay—ask the world!
Youth, beauty, virtue, an illustrious name,
An influence o'er mankind!

Val. When man perceives . . .
—Ah, I can only speak as for myself!

The D. Speak for yourself!

Val. May I?—no, I have spoken,
And time's gone by!—Had I seen such an one—
As I loved her—weighing thoroughly that word—
So should my task be to evolve her love—
If for myself!—if for another—well!

Berth. Heroic truly! And your sole reward,—
The secret pride in yielding up your own?

Val. Who thought upon reward? And yet how
much
Comes after—Oh what amplest recompence!
Is the knowledge of her, nought? the memory,
nought?

—Lady, should such an one have looked on you,
Ne'er wrong yourself so far as quote the world,
And say, love can go unrequited here!
You will have blessed him to his whole life's end—
Low passions hindered, baser cares kept back,

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

All goodness cherished where you dwelt—and dwell.
What would he have? He holds you—you, both form,
And mind, in his,—where self-love makes such room
For love of you, he would not serve you now
The vulgar way,—repulse your enemies,
Win you new realms, or best, in saving you
Die blissfully—that's past so long ago!
He wishes you no need, thought, care of him—
Your good, by any means, himself unseen,
Away, forgotten!—He gives that life's task up,
As it were . . . but this charge which I return—

[Offers the Requisition, which she takes.]

Wishing your good!

The D. *[having subscribed it.]* And opportunely, sir—
Since at a birthday's close, like this of mine,
Good wishes gentle deeds reciprocate.
Most on a wedding day, as mine is too,
Should gifts be thought of: yours comes first by right.
Ask of me!

Berth. He shall have whate'er he asks,
For your sake and his own!

Val. *[Aside.]* If I should ask—
The withered bunch of flowers she wears—perhaps,
One last touch of her hand, I never more
Shall see!

[After a pause, presenting his paper to the Prince.]

Cleves' Prince, redress the wrongs of Cleves!

Berth. I will, sir!

The D. *[as VALENCE prepares to retire.]*—Nay, do
out your duty, first!

You bore this paper: I have registered
My answer to it: read it and have done!

[VALENCE reads it.]

—I take him—give up Juliers and the world!

This is my Birth-day.

Mel. Berthold, my one hero
Of the world she gives up, one friend worth my
books,

Sole man I think it pays the pains to watch,—
Speak, for I know you through your Popes and Kings!

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Berth. [after a pause.] Lady, well rewarded! Sir,
as well deserved!

I could not imitate—I hardly envy—
I do admire you! All is for the best!
Too costly a flower were you, I see it now,
To pluck and set upon my barren helm
To wither—any garish plume will do!
I'll not insult you and refuse your Duchy—
You can so well afford to yield it me,
And I were left, without it, sadly off!
As it is—for me—if that will flatter you,
A somewhat wearier life seems to remain
Than I thought possible where . . . 'faith, their life
Begins already—they're too occupied
To listen—and few words content me best!
[Abruptly to the Courtiers.] I am your Duke, though!
Who obey me here?

The D. Adolf and Sabyne follow us—

Gwi. [starting from the Courtiers.]—And I?
Do I not follow them, if I mayn't you?
Shall not I get some little duties up
At Ravestein and emulate the rest?
God save you, Gaucelme! 'Tis my Birth-day, too!

Berth. You happy handful that remain with me
. . . That is, with Dietrich the black Barnabite
I shall leave over you—will earn your wages,
Or Dietrich has forgot to ply his trade!
Meantime,—go copy me the precedents
Of every installation, proper styles,
And pedigrees of all your Juliers' Dukes—
While I prepare to go on my old way,
And somewhat wearily, I must confess!

The D. [with a light joyous laugh as she turns
from them.] Come, Valence, to our friends—
God's earth . . .

Val. [as she falls into his arms.]—And thee!

DRAMATIC ROMANCES AND LYRICS

INSCRIBED
TO
JOHN KENYON, ESQ.,
IN THE HOPE THAT A RECOLLECTION OF HIS OWN
SUCCESSFUL
“ RHYMED PLEA FOR TOLERANCE ”
MAY INDUCE HIM TO ADMIT GOOD-NATUREDLY THIS
HUMBLER PROSE ONE OF
HIS VERY GRATEFUL AND AFFECTIONATE FRIEND.
R. B.

DRAMATIC ROMANCES AND LYRICS

CAVALIER TUNES.*

I.—MARCHING ALONG.

I.

KENTISH Sir Byng stood for his King,
Bidding the crop-headed Parliament swing:
And, pressing a troop unable to stoop
And see the rogues flourish and honest folk droop,
Marched them along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

II.

God for King Charles! Pym and such carles
To the Devil that prompts 'em their treasonous parles!
Cavaliers, up! Lips from the cup,
Hands from the pasty, nor bite take nor sup
'Till you're (*Chorus*) *marching along, fifty-score strong,*
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

III.

Hampden to Hell, and his obsequies' knell
Serve Hazelrig, Fiennes, and young Harry as well!

* Such Poems as the following come properly enough, I suppose, under the head of "Dramatic Pieces;" being, though for the most part Lyric in expression, always Dramatic in principle, and so many utterances of so many imaginary persons, not mine.

CAVALIER TUNES

England, good cheer! Rupert is near!
Kentish and loyalists, keep we not here

(Cho.) *Marching along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song*

IV.

Then, God for King Charles! Pym and his snarls
To the Devil that pricks on such pestilent carles!
Hold by the right, you double your might;
So, onward to Nottingham, fresh for the fight,

(Cho.) *March we along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song!*

II.—GIVE A ROUSE.

I.

King Charles, and who'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's, in Hell's despite now,
King Charles!

II.

Who gave me the goods that went since?
Who raised me the house that sank once?
Who helped me to gold I spent since?
Who found me in wine you drank once?

(Cho.) *King Charles, and who'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's, in Hell's despite now,
King Charles!*

III.

To whom used my boy George quaff else,
By the old fool's side that begot him?

CAVALIER TUNES

For whom did he cheer and laugh else,
While Noll's damned troopers shot him?

(Cho.) *King Charles, and who'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's, in Hell's despite now,
King Charles!*

III.—BOOT AND SADDLE.

I.

Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!
Rescue my Castle, before the hot day
Brightens to blue from its silvery gray,

(Cho.) *Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!*

II.

Ride past the suburbs, asleep as you'd say;
Many's the friend there, will listen and pray
"God's luck to gallants that strike up the lay,

(Cho.) *"Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!"*

III.

Forty miles off, like a roebuck at bay,
Flouts Castle Brancepeth the Roundheads' array:
Who laughs, "Good fellows ere this, by my fay,

(Cho.) *"Boot, saddle, to horse, and away?"*

IV.

Who? My wife Gertrude; that, honest and gay,
Laughs when you talk of surrendering, "Nay!
"I've better counsellors; what counsel they?

(Cho.) *"Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!"*

MY LAST DUCHESS

MY LAST DUCHESS.

FERRARA.

THAT's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive; I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Frà Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps
"Over my Lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
"Must never hope to reproduce the faint
"Half-flush that dies along her throat;" such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart . . . how shall I say? . . . too soon made
glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good; but
thanked
Somehow . . . I know not how . . . as if she ranked

COUNT GISMOND

My gift of a nine hundred years old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say "Just this
"Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
"Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
—E'en then would be some stooping, and I chuse
Never to stoop. Oh, Sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your Master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, Sir! Notice Neptune, tho,'
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me.

COUNT GISMOND.

AIX IN PROvence.

I.

CHRIST God, who savest men, save most
Of men Count Gismond who saved me!
Count Gauthier, when he chose his post,
Chose time and place and company
To suit it; when he struck at length
My honour 'twas with all his strength.

COUNT GISMOND

II.

And doubtlessly ere he could draw
All points to one, he must have schemed!
That miserable morning saw
Few half so happy as I seemed,
While being dressed in Queen's array
To give our Tourney prize away.

III.

I thought they loved me, did me grace
To please themselves; 'twas all their deed;
God makes, or fair or foul, our face;
If showing mine so caused to bleed
My cousins' hearts, they should have dropped
A word, and straight the play had stopped.

IV.

They, too, so beauteous! Each a queen
By virtue of her brow and breast;
Not needing to be crowned, I mean,
As I do. E'en when I was dressed,
Had either of them spoke, instead
Of glancing sideways with still head!

V.

But no: they let me laugh, and sing
My birthday song quite through, adjust
The last rose in my garland, fling
A last look on the mirror, trust
My arms to each an arm of theirs,
And so descend the castle-stairs—

VI.

And come out on the morning troop
Of merry friends who kissed my cheek,
And called me Queen, and made me stoop
Under the canopy—(a streak
That pierced it, of the outside sun,
Powdered with gold its gloom's soft dun)—

COUNT GISMOND

VII.

And they could let me take my state
And foolish throne amid applause
Of all come there to celebrate
My Queen's day—Oh, I think the cause
Of much was, they forgot no crowd
Makes up for parents in their shroud!

VIII.

Howe'er that be, all eyes were bent
Upon me, when my cousins cast
Theirs down; 'twas time I should present
The victor's crown, but . . . there, 'twill last
No long time . . . the old mist again
Blinds me as then it did. How vain!

IX.

See! Gismond's at the gate, in talk
With his two boys: I can proceed.
Well, at that moment, who should stalk
Forth boldly (to my face, indeed)
But Gauthier, and he thundered "Stay!"
And all stayed. "Bring no crowns, I say!"

X.

"Bring torches! Wind the penance-sheet
"About her! Let her shun the chaste,
"Or lay herself before their feet!
"Shall she, whose body I embraced
"A night long, queen it in the day?
"For Honour's sake no crowns, I say!"

XI.

I? What I answered? As I live,
I never fancied such a thing
As answer possible to give.
What says the body when they spring
Some monstrous torture-engine's whole
Strength on it? No more says the soul.

COUNT GISMOND

XII.

Till out strode Gismond; then I knew
That I was saved. I never met
His face before, but, at first view,
I felt quite sure that God had set
Himself to Satan; who would spend
A minute's mistrust on the end?

XIII.

He strode to Gauthier, in his throat
Gave him the lie, then struck his mouth
With one back-handed blow that wrote
In blood men's verdict there. North, South,
East, West, I looked. The lie was dead,
And damned, and truth stood up instead.

XIV.

This glads me most, that I enjoyed
The heart of the joy, with my content
In watching Gismond unalloyed
By any doubt of the event:
God took that on him—I was bid
Watch Gismond for my part: I did.

XV.

Did I not watch him while he let
His armourer just brace his greaves,
Rivet his hauberk, on the fret
The while! His foot . . . my memory leaves
No least stamp out, nor how anon
He pulled his ringing gauntlets on.

XVI.

And e'en before the trumpet's sound
Was finished, prone lay the false Knight,
Prone as his lie, upon the ground:
Gismond flew at him, used no sleight
Of the sword, but open-breasted drove,
Cleaving till out the truth he clove.

COUNT GISMOND

XVII.

Which done, he dragged him to my feet
And said "Here die, but end thy breath
"In full confession, lest thou fleet
"From my first, to God's second death!
"Say, hast thou lied?" And, "I have lied
"To God and her," he said, and died.

XVIII.

Then Gismond, kneeling to me, asked
—What safe my heart holds, tho' no word
Could I repeat now, if I tasked
My powers for ever, to a third
Dear even as you are. Pass the rest
Until I sank upon his breast.

XIX.

Over my head his arm he flung
Against the world; and scarce I felt
His sword, that dripped by me and swung,
A little shifted in its belt,—
For he began to say the while
How South our home lay many a mile.

XX.

So 'mid the shouting multitude
We two walked forth to never more
Return. My cousins have pursued
Their life, untroubled as before
I vexed them. Gauthier's dwelling-place
God lighten! May his soul find grace!

XXI.

Our elder boy has got the clear
Great brow; tho' when his brother's black
Full eye shows scorn, it . . . Gismond here?
And have you brought my tercel back?
I just was telling Adela
How many birds it struck since May.

INCIDENT OF THE FRENCH CAMP

INCIDENT OF THE FRENCH CAMP.

I.

You know, we French stormed Ratisbon :
A mile or so away
On a little mound, Napoléon
Stood on our storming-day ;
With neck out-thrust, you fancy how,
Legs wide, arms locked behind,
As if to balance the prone brow
Oppressive with its mind.

II.

Just as perhaps he mused " My plans
" That soar, to earth may fall,
" Let once my army-leader Lannes
" Waver at yonder wall,"—
Out 'twixt the battery-smokes there flew
A rider, bound on bound
Full-galloping ; nor bridle drew
Until he reached the mound.

III.

Then off there flung in smiling joy,
And held himself erect
By just his horse's mane, a boy :
You hardly could suspect—
(So tight he kept his lips compressed,
Scarce any blood came thro')
You looked twice ere you saw his breast
Was all but shot in two.

IV.

" Well," cried he, " Emperor, by God's grace
" We've got you Ratisbon !
" The Marshal's in the market-place,
" And you'll be there anon

THE SPANISH CLOISTER

"To see your flag-bird flap his vans
"Where I, to heart's desire,
"Perched him!" The Chief's eye flashed; his plans
Soared up again like fire.

V.

The Chief's eye flashed; but presently
Softened itself, as sheathes
A film the mother eagle's eye
When her bruised eaglet breathes:
"You're wounded!" "Nay," his soldier's pride
Touched to the quick, he said:
"I'm killed, Sire!" And, his Chief beside,
Smiling the boy fell dead.

SOLILOQUY OF THE SPANISH CLOISTER.

I.

GR-R-R—there go, my heart's abhorrence!
Water your damned flower-pots, do!
If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,
God's blood, would not mine kill you!
What? your myrtle-bush wants trimming?
Oh, that rose has prior claims—
Needs its leaden vase filled brimming?
Hell dry you up with its flames!

II.

At the meal we sit together:
Salve tibi! I must hear
Wise talk of the kind of weather,
Sort of season, time of year:
Not a plenteous cork-crop: scarcely
Dare we hope oak-galls, I doubt:
What's the Latin name for "parsley"?
What's the Greek name for Swine's Snout?

THE SPANISH CLOISTER

III.

Whew ! We'll have our platter burnished,
Laid with care on our own shelf !
With a fire-new spoon we're furnished,
And a goblet for ourself,
Rinsed like something sacrificial
Ere 'tis fit to touch our chaps—
Marked with L. for our initial !
(He, he ! There his lily snaps !)

IV.

Saint, forsooth ! While brown Dolores
Squats outside the Convent bank,
With Sanchicha, telling stories,
Steeping tresses in the tank,
Blue-black, lustrous, thick like horsehairs,
—Can't I see his dead eye glow
Bright, as 'twere a Barbary corsair's ?
(That is, if he'd let it show !)

V.

When he finishes refection,
Knife and fork he never lays
Cross-wise, to my recollection,
As do I, in Jesu's praise.
I, the Trinity illustrate,
Drinking watered orange-pulp—
In three sips the Arian frustrate;
While he drains his at one gulp !

VI.

Oh, those melons ! If he's able
We're to have a feast ; so nice !
One goes to the Abbot's table,
All of us get each a slice.
How go on your flowers ? None double ?
Not one fruit-sort can you spy ?
Strange !—And I, too, at such trouble,
Keep 'em close-nipped on the sly !

IN A GONDOLA

VII.

There's a great text in Galatians,
Once you trip on it, entails
Twenty-nine distinct damnations,
One sure, if another fails.
If I trip him just a-dying,
Sure of Heaven as sure can be,
Spin him round and send him flying
Off to Hell, a Manichee?

VIII.

Or, my scrofulous French novel,
On grey paper with blunt type !
Simply glance at it, you grovel
Hand and foot in Belial's gripe :
If I double down its pages
At the woeful sixteenth print,
When he gathers his greengages,
Ope a sieve and slip it in't ?

IX.

Or, there's Satan !—one might venture
Pledge one's soul to him, yet leave
Such a flaw in the indenture
As he'd miss till, past retrieve,
Blasted lay that rose-acacia
We're so proud of ! *Hy, Zy, Hine . . .*
'St, there's Vespers ! *Plena gratia*
Ave, Virgo ! Gr-r-r—you swine !

IN A GONDOLA.

He sings.

I SEND my heart up to thee, all my heart
In this my singing !
For the stars help me, and the sea bears part ;
The very night is clinging

IN A GONDOLA

Closer to Venice' streets to leave one space
Above me, whence thy face
May light my joyous heart to thee its dwelling-place.

She speaks.

Say after me, and try to say
My very words, as if each word
Came from you of your own accord,
In your own voice, in your own way:
"This woman's heart, and soul, and brain
"Are mine as much as this gold chain
"She bids me wear; which" (say again)
"I choose to make by cherishing
"A precious thing, or choose to fling
"Over the boat-side, ring by ring."
And yet once more say . . . no word more!
Since words are only words. Give o'er!
Unless you call me, all the same,
Familiarly by my pet-name
Which, if the Three should hear you call,
And me reply to, would proclaim
At once our secret to them all:
Ask of me, too, command me, blame—
Do break down the partition-wall
'Twixt us, the daylight world beholds
Curtained in dusky and splendid folds.
What's left but—all of me to take?
I am the Three's; prevent them, slake
Your thirst! 'Tis said, the Arab sage
In practising with gems can loose
Their subtle spirit in his cruce
And leave but ashes: so, sweet mage,
Leave them my ashes when thy use
Sucks out my soul, thy heritage!

He sings.

I.

Past we glide, and past, and past!
What's that poor Agnese doing

IN A GONDOLA

Where they make the shutters fast?
Grey Zanobi's just a-wooing
To his couch the purchased bride:
Past we glide!

II.

Past we glide, and past, and past!
Why's the Pucci Palace flaring
Like a beacon to the blast?
Guests by hundreds—not one caring
If the dear host's neck were wried:
Past we glide!

She sings.

I.

The Moth's kiss, first!
Kiss me as if you made believe
You were not sure, this eve,
How my face, your flower, had pursed
Its petals up; so, here and there
You brush it, till I grow aware
Who wants me, and wide open burst.

II.

The Bee's kiss, now!
Kiss me as if you entered gay
My heart at some noonday,
A bud that dares not disallow
The claim, so all is rendered up,
And passively its shattered cup
Over your head to sleep I bow.

He sings.

I.

What are we two?
I am a Jew,
And carry thee, farther than friends can pursue,
To a feast of our tribe,

IN A GONDOLA

Where they need thee to bribe
The devil that blasts them unless he imbibe
Thy . . . Shatter the vision for ever! And now,
As of old, I am I, Thou art Thou!

II.

Say again, what we are?
The sprite of a star,
I lure thee above where the Destinies bar
My plumes their full play
Till a ruddier ray
Than my pale one announce there is withering
away
Some . . . Shatter the vision for ever! And now,
As of old, I am I, Thou art Thou!

He muses.

Oh, which were best, to roam or rest?
The land's lap or the water's breast?
To sleep on yellow millet-sheaves,
Or swim in lucid shallows, just
Eluding water-lily leaves,
An inch from Death's black fingers, thrust
To lock you, whom release he must;
Which life were best on Summer eves?

He speaks, musing.

Lie back; could thought of mine improve you?
From this shoulder let there spring
A wing; from this, another wing;
Wings, not legs and feet, shall move you!
Snow-white must they spring, to blend
With your flesh, but I intend
They shall deepen to the end,
Broader, into burning gold,
Till both wings crescent-wise enfold
Your perfect self, from 'neath your feet
To o'er your head, where, lo, they meet
As if a million sword-blades hurled
Defiance from you to the world!

IN A GONDOLA

Rescue me thou, the only real!
And scare away this mad Ideal
That came, nor motions to depart!
Thanks! Now, stay ever as thou art!

Still he muses.

I.

What if the Three should catch at last
Thy serenader? While there's cast
Paul's cloak about my head, and fast
Gian pinions me, Himself has past
His stylet thro' my back; I reel;
And . . . is it Thou I feel?

II.

They trail me, these three godless knaves,
Past every church that sains and saves,
Nor stop till, where the cold sea raves
By Lido's wet accursed graves,
They scoop mine, roll me to its brink,
And . . . on Thy breast I sink!

She replies, musing.

Dip your arm o'er the boat-side, elbow-deep,
As I do: thus: were Death so unlike Sleep,
Caught this way? Death's to fear from flame, or steel,
Or poison doubtless; but from water—feel!

Go find the bottom! Would you stay me? There!
Now pluck a great blade of that ribbon-grass
To plait in where the foolish jewel was,
I flung away: since you have praised my hair,
'Tis proper to be choice in what I wear.

He speaks.

Row home? must we row home? Too surely
Know I where its front's demurely
Over the Giudecca piled;

IN A GONDOLA

Window just with window mating,
Door on door exactly waiting,
All's the set face of a child:
But behind it, where's a trace
Of the staidness and reserve,
And formal lines without a curve,
In the same child's playing-face?
No two windows look one way
O'er the small sea-water thread
Below them. Ah, the autumn day
I, passing, saw you overhead!
First, out a cloud of curtain blew,
Then, a sweet cry, and last, came you—
To catch your loory that must needs
Escape just then, of all times then,
To peck a tall plant's fleecy seeds,
And make me happiest of men.
I scarce could breathe to see you reach
So far back o'er the balcony,
(To catch him ere he climbed too high
Above you in the Smyrna peach)
That quick the round smooth cord of gold,
This coiled hair on your head, unrolled,
Fell down you like a gorgeous snake
The Roman girls were wont, of old,
When Rome there was, for coolness' sake
To let lie curling o'er their bosoms.
Dear loory, may his beak retain
Ever its delicate rose stain
As if the wounded lotus-blossoms
Had marked their thief to know again!
Stay longer yet, for others' sake
Than mine! what should your chamber do?
—With all its rarities that ache
In silence while day lasts, but wake
At night-time and their life renew,
Suspended just to pleasure you
—That brought against their will together
These objects, and, while day lasts, weave
Around them such a magic tether

IN A GONDOLA

That they look dumb : your harp, believe,
With all the sensitive tight strings
That dare not speak, now to itself
Breathes slumbrously as if some elf
Went in and out the chords, his wings
Make murmur wheresoe'er they graze,
As an angel may, between the maze
Of midnight palace-pillars, on
And on, to sow God's plagues have gone
Through guilty glorious Babylon.
And while such murmurs flow, the nymph
Bends o'er the harp-top from her shell,
As the dry limpet for the lymph
Come with a tune he knows so well.
And how your statues' hearts must swell !
And how your pictures must descend
To see each other, friend with friend !
Oh, could you take them by surprise,
You'd find Schidone's eager Duke
Doing the quaintest courtesies
To that prim Saint by Haste-thee-Luke :
And, deeper into her rock den,
Bold Castelfranco's Magdalen
You'd find retreated from the ken
Of that robed counsel-keeping Ser—
As if the Tizian thinks of her,
And is not, rather, gravely bent
On seeing for himself what toys
Are these, his progeny invent,
What litter now the board employs
Whereon he signed a document
That got him murdered ! Each enjoys
Its night so well, you cannot break
The sport up, so, indeed must make
More stay with me, for others' sake.

IN A GONDOLA

She speaks.

I.

To-morrow, if a harp-string, say,
Is used to tie the jasmine back
That overflows my room with sweets
Contrive your Zorzi somehow meets
My Zanze: in the ribbon's black,
The Three are watching; keep away.

II.

Your gondola—let Zorzi wreath
A mesh of water-weeds about
Its prow, as if he unaware
Had struck some quay or bridge-foot stair;
That I may throw a paper out
As you and he go underneath.

There's Zanze's vigilant taper; safe are we!
Only one minute more to-night with me?
Resume your past self of a month ago!
Be you the bashful gallant, I will be
The lady with the colder breast than snow:
Now bow you, as becomes, nor touch my hand
More than I touch yours when I step to land,
And say, All thanks, Siora!—

Heart to heart,
And lips to lips! Yet once more, ere we part,
Clasp me, and make me thine, as mine thou art!

He is surprised and stabbed.

It was ordained to be so, Sweet,—and best
Comes now, beneath thine eyes, and on thy breast.
Still kiss me! Care not for the cowards! Care
Only to put aside thy beauteous hair
My blood will hurt! The Three, I do not scorn
To death, because they never lived: but I
Have lived indeed, and so—(yet one more kiss)—can
die!

ARTEMIS PROLOGUIZES

ARTEMIS PROLOGUIZES.

I AM a Goddess of the ambrosial courts,
And save by Here, Queen of Pride, surpassed
By none whose temples whiten this the world.
Thro' Heaven I roll my lucid moon along;
I shed in Hell o'er my pale people peace;
On Earth, I, caring for the creatures, guard
Each pregnant yellow wolf and fox-bitch sleek,
And every feathered mother's callow brood,
And all that love green haunts and loneliness.
Of men, the chaste adore me, hanging crowns
Of poppies red to blackness, bell and stem,
Upon my image at Athenai here;
And this dead Youth, Asclepios bends above,
Was dearest to me. He my buskined step
To follow thro' the wild-wood leafy ways,
And chase the panting stag, or swift with darts
Stop the swift ounce, or lay the leopard low,
Neglected homage to another God:
Whence Aphrodite, by no midnight smoke
Of tapers lulled, in jealousy dispatched
A noisome lust that, as the gadbee stings,
Possessed his stepdame Phaidra for himself
The son of Theseus her great absent spouse.
Hippolutos exclaiming in his rage
Against the miserable Queen, she judged
Life insupportable, and, pricked at heart
An Amazonian stranger's race should dare
To scorn her, perished by the murderous cord:
Yet, ere she perished, blasted in a scroll
The fame of him her swerving made not swerve,
Which Theseus read, returning, and believed,
So, exiled in the blindness of his wrath,
The man without a crime, who, last as first,
Loyal, divulged not to his sire the truth.
Now Theseus from Poseidon had obtained

ARTEMIS PROLOGUIZES

That of his wishes should be granted Three,
And this he imprecated straight—alive
May ne'er Hippolutos reach other lands !
Poseidon heard, ai ai ! And scarce the prince
Had stepped into the fixed boots of the car,
That gave the feet a stay against the strength
Of the Henetian horses, and around
His body flung the reins, and urged their speed
Along the rocks and shingles of the shore,
When from the gaping wave a monster flung
His obscene body in the coursers' path !
These, mad with terror as the sea-bull sprawled
Wallowing about their feet, lost care of him
That reared them ; and the master-chariot-pole
Snapping beneath their plunges like a reed,
Hippolutos, whose feet were trammelled fast,
Was yet dragged forward by the circling rein
Which either hand directed ; nor was quenched
The frenzy of that flight before each trace,
Wheel-spoke and splinter of the woeful car,
Each boulder-stone, sharp stub, and spiny shell,
Huge fish-bone wrecked and wreathed amid the sands
On that detested beach, was bright with blood
And morsels of his flesh : then fell the steeds
Head-foremost, crashing in their mooned fronts,
Shivering with sweat, each white eye horror-fixed.
His people, who had witnessed all afar,
Bore back the ruins of Hippolutos.
But when his sire, too swoln with pride, rejoiced,
(Indomitable as a man foredoomed)
That vast Poseidon had fulfilled his prayer,
I, in a flood of glory visible,
Stood o'er my dying votary, and deed
By deed revealed, as all took place, the truth.
Then Theseus lay the woefullest of men,
And worthily ; but ere the death-veils hid
His face, the murdered prince full pardon breathed
To his rash sire. Whereat Athenai wails.
So, I who ne'er forsake my votaries,
Lest in the cross-way none the honey-cake

ARTEMIS PROLOGUIZES

Should tender, nor pour out the dog's hot life;
Lest at my fain the priests disconsolate
Should dress my image with some faded poor
Few crowns, made favours of, nor dare object
Such slackness to my worshippers who turn
The trusting heart and loaded hand elsewhere,
As they had climbed Oulumpos to report
Of Artemis and nowhere found her throne—
I interposed: and, this eventful night,
While round the funeral pyre the populace
Stood with fierce light on their black robes that
blind

Each sobbing head, while yet their hair they clipped
O'er the dead body of their withered prince,
And, in his palace, Theseus prostrated
On the cold hearth, his brow cold as the slab
Twas bruised on, groaned away the heavy grief—
As the pyre fell, and down the cross logs crashed,
Sending a crowd of sparkles thro' the night,
And the gay fire, elate with mastery,
Towered like a serpent o'er the clotted jars
Of wine, dissolving oils and frankincense,
And splendid gums, like gold,—my potency
Conveyed the perished man to my retreat
In the thrice venerable forest here.

And this white-bearded Sage who squeezes now
The berried plant, is Phoibos' son of fame,
Asclepios, whom my radiant brother taught
The doctrine of each herb and flower and root,
To know their secret'st virtue and express
The saving soul of all—who so has soothed
With lavers the torn brow and murdered cheeks,
Composed the hair and brought its gloss again,
And called the red bloom to the pale skin back,
And laid the strips and jagged ends of flesh
Even once more, and slacked the sinew's knot
Of every tortured limb—that now he lies
As if mere sleep possessed him underneath
These interwoven oaks and pines. Oh, cheer,
Divine presenter of the healing rod

WARING

Thy snake, with ardent throat and lulling eye,
Twines his lithe spires around! I say, much cheer!
Proceed thou with thy wisest pharmacies!
And ye, white crowd of woodland sister-nymphs,
Ply, as the Sage directs, these buds and leaves
That strew the turf around the Twain! While I
Await, in fitting silence, the event.

WARING.

I.

1.

WHAT'S become of Waring
Since he gave us all the slip,
Chose land-travel or seafaring,
Boots and chest, or staff and scrip,
Rather than pace up and down
Any longer London-town?

II.

Who'd have guessed it from his lip,
Or his brow's accustomed bearing,
On the night he thus took ship,
Or started landward?—little caring
For us, it seems, who supped together,
(Friends of his too, I remember)
And walked home thro' the merry weather,
The snowiest in all December;
I left his arm that night myself
For what's-his-name's, the new prose-poet,
That wrote the book there, on the shelf—
How, forsooth, was I to know it
If Waring meant to glide away
Like a ghost at break of day?
Never looked he half so gay!

WARING

III.

He was prouder than the Devil:
How he must have cursed our revel!
Ay, and many other meetings,
Indoor visits, outdoor greetings,
As up and down he paced this London,
With no work done, but great works undone,
Where scarce twenty knew his name.
Why not, then, have earlier spoken,
Written, bustled? Who's to blame
If your silence kept unbroken?
"True, but there were sundry jottings,
"Stray-leaves, fragments, blurrs and blottings,
"Certain first steps were achieved
"Already which"—(is that your meaning?)
"Had well borne out whoe'er believed
"In more to come!" But who goes gleaning
Hedge-side chance-blades, while full-sheaved
Stand cornfields by him? Pride, o'erweening
Pride alone, puts forth such claims
O'er the day's distinguished names.

IV.

Meantime, how much I loved him,
I find out now I've lost him:
I, who cared not if I moved him,
Who could so carelessly accost him,
Henceforth never shall get free
Of his ghostly company,
His eyes that just a little wink
As deep I go into the merit
Of this and that distinguished spirit—
His cheeks' raised colour, soon to sink,
As long I dwell on some stupendous
And tremendous (Heaven defend us!)
Monstr'-inform'-ingens-horrend-ous
Demoniaco-seraphic
Penman's latest piece of graphic.
Nay, my very wrist grows warm

WARING

With his dragging weight of arm !
E'en so, swimmingly appears,
Thro' one's after-supper musings,
Some lost Lady of old years,
With her beauteous vain endeavour,
And goodness unrepaid as ever ;
The face, accustomed to refusings,
We, puppies that we were . . . Oh never
Surely, nice of conscience, scrupled
Being aught like false, forsooth, to ?
Telling aught but honest truth to ?
What a sin, had we centupled
Its possessor's grace and sweetness !
No ! she heard in its completeness
Truth, for truth's a weighty matter,
And, truth at issue, we can't flatter !
Well, 'tis done with : she's exempt
From damning us thro' such a sally ;
And so she glides, as down a valley,
Taking up with her contempt,
Past our reach ; and in, the flowers
Shut her unregarded hours.

V.

Oh, could I have him back once more,
This Waring, but one half-day more !
Back, with the quiet face of yore,
So hungry for acknowledgment
Like mine ! I'd fool him to his bent !
Feed, should not he, to heart's content ?
I'd say, "to only have conceived
"Your great works, tho' they ne'er make progress,
"Surpasses all we've yet achieved !"
I'd lie so, I should be believed.
I'd make such havoc of the claims
Of the day's distinguished names
To feast him with, as feasts an ogress
Her sharp-toothed golden-crowned child !
Or, as one feasts a creature rarely
Captured here, unreconciled

WARING

To capture ; and completely gives
Its pettish humours licence, barely
Requiring that it lives.

VI.

Ichabod, Ichabod,
The glory is departed !
Travels Waring East away ?
Who, of knowledge, by hearsay,
Reports a man upstarted
Somewhere as a God,
Hordes grown European-hearted,
Millions of the wild made tame
On a sudden at his fame ?
In Vishnu-land what Avatar ?
Or who, in Moscow, toward the Ozar,
With the demurest of footfalls
Over the Kremlin's pavement, bright
With serpentine and syenite,
Steps, with five other Generals,
That simultaneously take snuff,
For each to have pretext enough
To kerchiefwise unfurl his sash
Which, softness' self, is yet the stuff
To hold fast where a steel chain snaps,
And leave the grand white neck no gash ?
Waring, in Moscow, to those rough
Cold northern natures borne, perhaps,
Like the lambwhite maiden dear
From the circle of mute kings,
Unable to repress the tear,
Each as his sceptre down he flings,
To Dian's fane at Taurica,
Where now a captive priestess, she alway
Mingles her tender grave Hellenic speech
With theirs, tuned to the hailstone-beaten beach,
As pours some pigeon, from the myrrhy lands
Rapt by the whirlblast to fierce Scythian strands
Where breed the swallows, her melodious cry
Amid their barbarous twitter !

WARING

In Russia? Never! Spain were fitter!
Ay, most likely 'tis in Spain
That we and Waring meet again—
Now, while he turns down that cool narrow lane
Into the blackness, out of grave Madrid
All fire and shine—abrupt as when there's slid
Its stiff gold blazing pall
From some black coffin-lid.
Or, best of all,
I love to think
The leaving us was just a feint;
Back here to London did he slink;
And now works on without a wink
Of sleep, and we are on the brink
Of something great in fresco-paint:
Some garret's ceiling, walls and floor,
Up and down and o'er and o'er
He splashes, as none splashed before
Since great Caldara Polidore:
Or Music means this land of ours
Some favour yet, to pity won
By Purcell from his Rosy Bowers,—
“Give me my so long promised son,
“Let Waring end what I begun!”
Then down he creeps and out he steals
Only when the night conceals
His face—in Kent 'tis cherry-time,
Or, hops are picking; or, at prime
Of March, he wanders as, too happy,
Years ago when he was young,
Some mild eve when woods grew sappy
And the early moths had sprung
To life from many a trembling sheath
Woven the warm boughs beneath;
While small birds said to themselves
What should soon be actual song,
And young gnats, by tens and twelves,
Made as if they were the throng
That crowd around and carry aloft
The sound they have nursed, so sweet and pure,

WARING

Out of a myriad noises soft,
Into a tone that can endure
Amid the noise of a July noon,
When all God's creatures crave their boon,
All at once and all in tune,
And get it, happy as Waring then,
Having first within his ken
What a man might do with men,
And far too glad, in the even-glow,
To mix with your world he meant to take
Into his hand, he told you, so—
And out of it his world to make,
To contract and to expand
As he shut or oped his hand.
Oh, Waring, what's to really be?
A clear stage and a crowd to see!
Some Garrick—say—out shall not he
The heart of Hamlet's mystery pluck?
Or, where most unclean beasts are rife,
Some Junius—am I right?—shall tuck
His sleeve, and out with flaying-knife!
Some Chatterton shall have the luck
Of calling Rowley into life!
Some one shall somehow run a muck
With this old world, for want of strife
Sound asleep: contrive, contrive
To rouse us, Waring! Who's alive?
Our men scarce seem in earnest now:
Distinguished names!—but 'tis, somehow,
As if they played at being names .
Still more distinguished, like the games
Of children. Turn our sport to earnest
With a visage of the sternest!
Bring the real times back, confessed
Still better than our very best!

WARING

II.

I.

"WHEN I last saw Waring . . ."
(How all turned to him who spoke—
You saw Waring? Truth or joke?
In land-travel, or sea-faring?)

II.

"We were sailing by Triest,
"Where a day or two we harboured :
"A sunset was in the West,
"When, looking over the vessel's side,
"One of our company espied
"A sudden speck to larboard.
"And, as a sea-duck flies and swims
"At once, so came the light craft up,
"With its sole lateen sail that trims
"And turns (the water round its rims
"Dancing, as round a sinking cup)
"And by us like a fish it curled,
"And drew itself up close beside,
"Its great sail on the instant furled,
"And o'er its planks, a shrill voice cried,
"(A neck as bronzed as a Lascar's)
"Buy wine of us, you English Brig?
"Or fruit, tobacco and cigars?
"A Pilot for you to Triest?
"Without one, look you ne'er so big,
"They'll never let you up the bay!
"We natives should know best.'
"I turned, and 'just those fellows' way,'
"Our captain said, 'The 'long-shore thieves
"Are laughing at us in their sleeves.'

III.

"In truth, the boy leaned laughing back ;
"And one, half-hidden by his side
"Under the furled sail, soon I spied,
"With great grass hat, and kerchief black,

RUDEL TO THE LADY OF TRIPOLI

"Who looked up, with his kingly throat,
"Said somewhat, while the other shook
"His hair back from his eyes to look
"Their longest at us; then the boat,
"I know not how, turned sharply round,
"Laying her whole side on the sea
"As a leaping fish does; from the lee
"Into the weather, cut somehow
"Her sparkling path beneath our bow;
"And so went off, as with a bound,
"Into the rose and golden half
"Of the sky, to overtake the sun,
"And reach the shore, like the sea-calf
"Its singing cave; yet I caught one
"Glance ere away the boat quite passed,
"And neither time nor toil could mar
"Those features: so I saw the last
"Of Waring!"—You? Oh, never star
Was lost here, but it rose afar!
Look East, where whole new thousands are!
In Vishnu-land what Avatar?

RUDEL TO THE LADY OF TRIPOLI

I.

I KNOW a Mount, the gracious Sun perceives
First when he visits, last, too, when he leaves
The world; and, vainly favoured, it repays
The day-long glory of his steadfast gaze
By no change of its large calm front of snow.
And underneath the Mount, a Flower I know,
He cannot have perceived, that changes ever
At his approach; and, in the lost endeavour
To live his life, has parted, one by one,
With all a flower's true graces, for the grace
Of being but a foolish mimic sun;
With ray-like florets round a disk-like face.
Men nobly call by many a name the Mount,

CRISTINA

As over many a land of theirs its large
Calm front of snow like a triumphal targe
Is reared, and still with old names, fresh ones vie,
Each to its proper praise and own account:
Men call the Flower, the Sunflower, sportively.

II.

Oh, Angel of the East, one, one gold look
Across the waters to this twilight nook,
—The far sad waters, Angel, to this nook!

III.

Dear Pilgrim, art thou for the East indeed?
Go! Saying ever as thou dost proceed,
That I, French Rudel, choose for my device
A sunflower outspread like a sacrifice
Before its idol. See! These inexpert
And hurried fingers could not fail to hurt
The woven picture; 'tis a woman's skill
Indeed; but nothing baffled me, so, ill
Or well, the work is finished. Say, men feed
On songs I sing, and therefore bask the bees
On my flower's breast as on a platform broad:
But, as the flower's concern is not for these
But solely for the sun, so men applaud
In vain this Rudel, he not looking here
But to the East—the East! Go, say this, Pilgrim
 dear!

CRISTINA

I.

SHE should never have looked at me,
If she meant I should not love her!
There are plenty . . . men, you call such,
I suppose . . . she may discover
All her soul to, if she pleases,
And yet leave much as she found them;

CRISTINA

But I'm not so, and she knew it
When she fixed me, glancing round them.

II.

What? To fix me thus meant nothing?
But I can't tell . . . there's my weakness . . .
What her look said! no vile cant, sure,
About "need to strew the bleakness
"Of some lone shore with its pearl-seed,
"That the Sea feels"—no "strange yearning
"That such souls have, most to lavish
"Where there's chance of least returning."

III.

Oh, we're sunk enough here, God knows!
But not quite so sunk that moments,
Sure tho' seldom, are denied us,
When the spirit's true endowments
Stand out plainly from its false ones,
And apprise it if pursuing
Or the right way or the wrong way,
To its triumph or undoing.

IV.

There are flashes struck from midnights,
There are fire-flames noondays kindle,
Whereby piled-up honours perish,
Whereby sworn ambitions dwindle,
While just this or that poor impulse,
Which for once had play unstified,
Seems the sole work of a life-time
That away the rest have trifled.

V.

Doubt you if, in some such moment,
As she fixed me, she felt clearly,
Ages past the soul existed,
Here an age 'tis resting merely,
And hence, fleets again for ages :
While the true end, sole and single,

MADHOUSE CELL

It stops here for is, this love-way,
With some other soul to mingle?

VI.

Else it loses what it lived for,
And eternally must lose it;
Better ends may be in prospect,
Deeper blisses, if you choose it,
But this life's end and this love-bliss
Have been lost here. Doubt you whether
This she felt, as, looking at me,
Mine and her souls rushed together?

VII.

Oh, observe! Of course, next moment,
The world's honours, in derision,
Trampled out the light for ever:
Never fear but there's provision
Of the Devil's to quench knowledge
Lest we walk the earth in rapture!
—Making those who catch God's secret
Just so much more prize their capture.

VIII.

Such am I: the secret's mine now!
She has lost me—I have gained her!
Her soul's mine: and, thus, grown perfect,
I shall pass my life's remainder,
Life will just hold out the proving
Both our powers, alone and blended—
And then, come the next life quickly!
This world's use will have been ended.

I.—MADHOUSE CELL

JOHANNES AGRICOLA IN MEDITATION.

THERE'S Heaven above, and night by night,
I look right through its gorgeous roof;

MADHOUSE CELL

No sun and moons though e'er so bright
Avail to stop me; splendour-proof
I keep the broods of stars aloof:
For I intend to get to God,
For 'tis to God I speed so fast,
For in God's breast, my own abode,
Those shoals of dazzling glory past,
I lay my spirit down at last.
I lie where I have always lain,
God smiles as he has always smiled;
Ere suns and moons could wax and wane,
Ere stars were thundergirt, or piled
The Heavens, God thought on me his child;
Ordained a life for me, arrayed
Its circumstances, every one
To the minutest; ay, God said
This head this hand should rest upon
Thus, ere he fashioned star or sun.
And having thus created me,
Thus rooted me, he bade me grow,
Guiltless for ever, like a tree
That buds and blooms, nor seeks to know
The law by which it prospers so:
But sure that thought and word and deed
All go to swell his love for me,
Me, made because that love had need
Of something irrevocably
Pledged solely its content to be.
Yes, yes, a tree which must ascend,—
No poison-gourd foredoomed to stoop!
I have God's warrant, could I blend
All hideous sins, as in a cup,
To drink the mingled venoms up,
Secure my nature will convert
The draught to blossoming gladness fast,
While sweet dew's turn to the gourd's hurt,
And bloat, and while they bloat it, blast,
As from the first its lot was cast.
For as I lie, smiled on, full fed
By unexhausted power to bless,

MADHOUSE CELL

I gaze below on Hell's fierce bed,
And those its waves of flame oppress,
Swarming in ghastly wretchedness ;
Whose life on earth aspired to be
One altar-smoke, so pure !—to win
If not love like God's love to me,
At least to keep his anger in,
And all their striving turned to sin !
Priest, doctor, hermit, monk grown white
With prayer, the broken-hearted nun,
The martyr, the wan acolyte,
The incense-swinging child,—undone
Before God fashioned star or sun !
God, whom I praise ; how could I praise,
If such as I might understand,
Make out, and reckon on, his ways,
And bargain for his love, and stand,
Paying a price, at his right hand ?

II.—MADHOUSE CELL

PORPHYRIA'S LOVER

THE rain set early in to-night,
The sullen wind was soon awake,
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
And did its worst to vex the lake,
I listened with heart fit to break ;
When glided in Porphyria : straight
She shut the cold out and the storm,
And kneeled and made the cheerless grate
Blaze up, and all the cottage warm ;
Which done, she rose, and from her form
Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,
And laid her soiled gloves by, untied
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,
And, last, she sate down by my side
And called me. When no voice replied,

MADHOUSE CELL

She put my arm about her waist,
And made her smooth white shoulder bare,
And all her yellow hair displaced,
And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,
And spread o'er all her yellow hair,
Murmuring how she loved me; she
Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,
To set its struggling passion free
From pride, and vainer ties dissever,
And give herself to me for ever:
But passion sometimes would prevail,
Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain
A sudden thought of one so pale
For love of her, and all in vain;
So, she was come through wind and rain.
Be sure I looked up at her eyes
Proud, very proud; at last I knew
Porphyria worshipped me; surprise
Made my heart swell, and still it grew
While I debated what to do.
That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
Perfectly pure and good: I found
A thing to do, and all her hair
In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat around,
And strangled her. No pain felt she;
I am quite sure she felt no pain.
As a shut bud that holds a bee
I warily oped her lids; again
Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.
And I untightened next the tress
About her neck; her cheek once more
Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:
I propped her head up as before,
Only, this time *my* shoulder bore
Her head, which droops upon it still:
The smiling rosy little head,
So glad it has its utmost will,
That all it scorned at once is fled,
And I, its love, am gained instead!

THROUGH THE METIDJA

Porphyria's love: she guessed not how
Her darling one wish would be heard.
And thus we sit together now,
And all night long we have not stirred,
And yet God has not said a word!

THROUGH THE METIDJA TO ABD-EL-KADR

1842

I.

As I ride, as I ride,
With a full heart for my guide,
So its tide rocks my side,
As I ride, as I ride,
That, as I were double-eyed,
He, in whom our Tribes confide,
Is descried, ways untried
As I ride, as I ride.

II.

As I ride, as I ride
To our Chief and his Allied,
Who dares chide my heart's pride
As I ride, as I ride?
Or are witnesses denied—
Through the desert waste and wide
Do I glide unespied
As I ride, as I ride?

III.

As I ride, as I ride,
When an inner voice has cried,
The sands slide, nor abide
(As I ride, as I ride)
O'er each visioned Homicide
That came vaunting (has he lied?)
To reside—where he died,
As I ride, as I ride.

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN

IV.

As I ride, as I ride,
Ne'er has spur my swift horse plied,
Yet his hide, streaked and pied,
As I ride, as I ride,
Shows where sweat has sprung and dried,
—Zebra-footed, ostrich-thighed—
How has vied stride with stride
As I ride, as I ride!

V.

As I ride, as I ride,
Could I loose what Fate has tied,
Ere I pried, she should hide
As I ride, as I ride,
All that's meant me: satisfied
When the Prophet and the Bride
Stop veins I'd have subside
As I ride, as I ride!

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN;

A CHILD'S STORY

(WRITTEN FOR, AND INSCRIBED TO, W. M. THE YOUNGER.)

I.

HAMELIN Town's in Brunswick,
By famous Hanover city;
The River Weser, deep and wide,
Washes its wall on the southern side;
A pleasanter spot you never spied;
But, when begins my ditty,
Almost five hundred years ago,
To see townsfolk suffer so
From vermin, was a pity.

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN

II.

Rats!

They fought the dogs, and killed the cats,
And bit the babies in the cradles,
And ate the cheeses out of the vats,
And licked the soup from the cook's own ladles,
Split open the kegs of salted sprats,
Made nests inside men's Sunday hats,
And even spoiled the women's chats,
By drowning their speaking
With shrieking and squeaking
In fifty different sharps and flats.

III.

At last the people in a body
To the Town Hall came flocking:
" 'Tis clear," cried they, "our Mayor's a noddy;
"And as for our Corporation—shocking
"To think we buy gowns lined with ermine
"For dolts that can't or won't determine
"What's best to rid us of our vermin!
"You hope, because you're old and obese,
"To find in the furry civic robe ease?
"Rouse up, Sirs! Give your brains a racking
"To find the remedy we're lacking,
"Or, sure as fate, we'll send you packing!"
At this the Mayor and Corporation
Quaked with a mighty consternation.

IV.

An hour they sate in council,
At length the Mayor broke silence:
"For a guilder I'd my ermine gown sell
"I wish I were a mile hence!
"It's easy to bid one rack one's brain—
"I'm sure my poor head aches again
"I've scratched it so, and all in vain.
"Oh for a trap, a trap, a trap!"
Just as he said this, what should hap
At the chamber door but a gentle tap?

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN

"Bless us," cried the Mayor, "what's that?"
(With the Corporation as he sat,
Looking little though wondrous fat;
Nor brighter was his eye, nor moister
Than a too-long-opened oyster,
Save when at noon his paunch grew mutinous
For a plate of turtle green and glutinous)
"Only a scraping of shoes on the mat?
"Anything like the sound of a rat
"Makes my heart go pit-a-pat!

V.

"Come in!"—the Mayor cried, looking bigger:
And in did come the strangest figure!
His queer long coat from heel to head
Was half of yellow and half of red;
And he himself was tall and thin,
With sharp blue eyes, each like a pin,
And light loose hair, yet swarthy skin,
No tuft on cheek nor beard on chin,
But lips where smiles went out and in—
There was no guessing his kith and kin!
And nobody could enough admire
The tall man and his quaint attire:
Quoth one: "It's as my great-grandsire,
"Starting up at the Trump of Doom's tone,
"Had walked this way from his painted tomb-
stone!"

VI.

He advanced to the council-table:
And, "Please your honours," said he, "I'm able,
"By means of a secret charm, to draw
"All creatures living beneath the sun,
"That creep, or swim, or fly, or run,
"After me so as you never saw!
"And I chiefly use my charm
"On creatures that do people harm,
"The mole, and toad, and newt, and viper;
"And people call me the Pied Piper."

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN

(And here they noticed round his neck
A scarf of red and yellow stripe,
To match with his coat of the self same cheque;
And at the scarf's end hung a pipe;
And his fingers, they noticed, were ever straying
As if impatient to be playing
Upon this pipe, as low it dangled
Over his vesture so old-fangled.)
"Yet," said he, "poor piper as I am,
"In Tartary I freed the Cham,
"Last June, from his huge swarms of gnats;
"I eased in Asia the Nizam
"Of a monstrous brood of vampire-bats:
"And, as for what your brain bewilders,
"If I can rid your town of rats
"Will you give me a thousand guilders?"
"One? fifty thousand!"—was the exclamation
Of the astonished Mayor and Corporation.

VII.

Into the street the Piper stept,
Smiling first a little smile,
As if he knew what magic slept
In his quiet pipe the while;
Then, like a musical adept,
To blow the pipe his lips he wrinkled,
And green and blue his sharp eyes twinkled
Like a candle flame where salt is sprinkled;
And ere three shrill notes the pipe uttered,
You heard as if an army muttered;
And the muttering grew to a grumbling;
And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling;
And out of the houses the rats came tumbling:
Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,
Brown rats, black rats, grey rats, tawny rats,
Grave old plodders, gay young friskers,
Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins,
Cocking tails and pricking whiskers,
Families by tens and dozens,
Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives—

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN

Followed the Piper for their lives.
From street to street he piped advancing,
And step for step they followed dancing,
Until they came to the river Weser
Wherein all plunged and perished
—Save one who, stout as Julius Cæsar,
Swam across and lived to carry
(As he the manuscript he cherished)
To Rat-land home his commentary,
Which was, “At the first shrill notes of the pipe,
“I heard a sound as of scraping tripe,
“And putting apples, wondrous ripe,
“Into a cider-press’s gripe:
“And a moving away of pickle-tub boards,
“And a leaving ajar of conserve-cupboards,
“And the drawing the corks of train-oil-flasks,
“And a breaking the hoops of butter-casks;
“And it seemed as if a voice
“(Sweeter far than by harp or by psaltery
“Is breathed) called out, Oh rats, rejoice!
“The world is grown to one vast drysaltery!
“So munch on, crunch on, take your nuncheon,
“Breakfast, supper, dinner, luncheon!
“And just as a bulky sugar-puncheon,
“All ready staved, like a great sun shone
“Glorious scarce an inch before me,
“Just as methought it said, Come, bore me!
“—I found the Weser rolling o’er me.”

VIII.

You should have heard the Hamelin people
Ringing the bells till they rocked the steeple;
“Go,” cried the Mayor, “and get long poles!
“Poke out the nests and block up the holes!
“Consult with carpenters and builders,
“And leave in our town not even a trace
“Of the rats!”—when suddenly up the face
Of the Piper perked in the market-place,
With a, “First, if you please, my thousand
guilders!”

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN

IX.

A thousand guilders! The Mayor looked blue;
So did the Corporation too.
For council dinners made rare havock
With Claret, Moselle, Vin-de-Grave, Hock;
And half the money would replenish
Their cellar's biggest butt with Rhenish.
To pay this sum to a wandering fellow
With a gipsy coat of red and yellow!
"Beside," quoth the Mayor with a knowing wink,
"Our business was done at the river's brink;
"We saw with our eyes the vermin sink,
"And what's dead can't come to life, I think.
"So, friend, we're not the folks to shrink
"From the duty of giving you something for drink,
"And a matter of money to put in your poke;
"But, as for the guilders, what we spoke
"Of them, as you very well know, was in joke.
"Beside, our losses have made us thrifty;
"A thousand guilders! Come, take fifty!"

X.

The Piper's face fell, and he cried,
"No trifling! I can't wait, beside!
"I've promised to visit by dinner time
"Bagdat, and accept the prime
"Of the Head Cook's pottage, all he's rich in,
"For having left, in the Caliph's kitchen,
"Of a nest of scorpions no survivor—
"With him I proved no bargain-driver,
"With you, don't think I'll bate a stiver!
"And folks who put me in a passion
"May find me pipe to another fashion."

XI.

"How?" cried the Mayor, "d'ye think I'll brook
"Being worse created than a Cook?
"Insulted by a lazy ribald
"With idle pipe and vesture piebald?"

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN

"You threaten us, fellow? Do your worst,
"Blow your pipe there till you burst!"

XII.

Once more he stept into the street;
And to his lips again
Laid his long pipe of smooth straight cane;
And ere he blew three notes (such sweet
Soft notes as yet musician's cunning
Never gave the enraptured air)
There was a rustling, that seemed like a bustling
Of merry crowds justling at pitching and hustling,
Small feet were pattering, wooden shoes clattering,
Little hands clapping, and little tongues chattering,
And, like fowls in a farm-yard when barley is
scattering,
Out came the children running.
All the little boys and girls,
With rosy cheeks and flaxen curls,
And sparkling eyes and teeth like pearls,
Tripping and skipping, ran merrily after
The wonderful music with shouting and laughter.

XIII.

The Mayor was dumb, and the Council stood
As if they were changed into blocks of wood,
Unable to move a step, or cry
To the children merrily skipping by—
And could only follow with the eye
That joyous crowd at the Piper's back.
But how the Mayor was on the rack,
And the wretched Council's bosoms beat,
As the Piper turned from the High Street
To where the Weser rolled its waters
Right in the way of their sons and daughters!
However he turned from South to West,
And to Koppelberg Hill his steps addressed,
And after him the children pressed;
Great was the joy in every breast.
"He never can cross that mighty top!"

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN

“He’s forced to let the piping drop,
“And we shall see our children stop!”
When, lo, as they reached the mountain’s side,
A wondrous portal opened wide,
As if a cavern was suddenly hollowed;
And the Piper advanced and the children followed
And when all were in to the very last,
The door in the mountain side shut fast.
Did I say, all? No! One was lame,
And could not dance the whole of the way;
And in after years, if you would blame
His sadness, he was used to say,—
“It’s dull in our town since my playmates left!
“I can’t forget that I’m bereft
“Of all the pleasant sights they see,
“Which the Piper also promised me;
“For he led us, he said, to a joyous land,
“Joining the town and just at hand,
“Where waters gushed and fruit-trees grew,
“And flowers put forth a fairer hue,
“And everything was strange and new;
“The sparrows were brighter than peacocks here
“And their dogs outran our fallow deer,
“And honey-bees had lost their stings,
“And horses were born with eagles’ wings;
“And just as I became assured
“My lame foot would be speedily cured,
“The music stopped and I stood still,
“And found myself outside the Hill,
“Left alone against my will,
“To go now limping as before,
“And never hear of that country more!”

XIV.

Alas, alas for Hamelin!

There came into many a burgher’s pate
A text which says, that Heaven’s Gate
Opes to the Rich at as easy rate
As the needle’s eye takes a camel in!
The Mayor sent East, West, North, and South

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN

To offer the Piper by word of mouth,

Wherever it was men's lot to find him,
Silver and gold to his heart's content,
If he'd only return the way he went,

And bring the children behind him.

But when they saw 'twas a lost endeavour,
And Piper and dancers were gone for ever,
They made a decree that lawyers never

Should think their records dated duly
If, after the day of the month and year,
These words did not as well appear,

"And so long after what happened here

"On the Twenty-second of July,

"Thirteen hundred and Seventy-six:"

And the better in memory to fix

The place of the Children's last retreat,

They called it, the Pied Piper's Street—

Where any one playing on pipe or tabor

Was sure for the future to lose his labour.

Nor suffered they Hostelry or Tavern

To shock with mirth a street so solemn;

But opposite the place of the cavern

They wrote the story on a column,

And on the Great Church Window painted

The same, to make the world acquainted

How their children were stolen away;

And there it stands to this very day.

And I must not omit to say

That in Transylvania there's a tribe

Of alien people that ascribe

The outlandish ways and dress

On which their neighbours lay such stress,

To their fathers and mothers having risen

Out of some subterraneous prison

Into which they were trepanned

Long time ago in a mighty band

Out of Hamelin town in Brunswick land,

But how or why, they don't understand.

HOW THEY BROUGHT THE NEWS

xv.

So, Willy, let you and me be wipers
Of scores out with all men—especially pipers :
And, whether they pipe us free, from rats or
from mice,
If we've promised them aught, let us keep our
promise.

“HOW THEY BROUGHT THE GOOD NEWS FROM GHENT TO AIX.”

[16—.]

I.

I SPRANG to the stirrup, and Joris, and he ;
I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all three ;
“Good speed !” cried the watch, as the gate-bolts
undrew ;
“Speed !” echoed the wall to us galloping through ;
Behind shut the postern, the lights sank to rest,
And into the midnight we galloped abreast.

II.

Not a word to each other ; we kept the great pace
Neck by neck, stride by stride, never changing our
place ;
I turned in my saddle and made its girths tight,
Then shortened each stirrup, and set the pique right,
Rebuckled the cheek-strap, chained slacker the bit,
Nor galloped less steadily Roland a whit.

III.

'Twas moonset at starting ; but while we drew near
Lokern, the cocks crew and twilight dawned clear ;
At Boom, a great yellow star came out to see ;
At Düffeld, 'twas morning as plain as could be ;

HOW THEY BROUGHT THE NEWS

And from Mecheln church-steeple we heard the half-chime,
So Joris broke silence with, "Yet there is time!"

IV.

At Aerschot, up leaped of a sudden the sun,
And against him the cattle stood black every one,
To stare thro' the mist at us galloping past,
And I saw my stout galloper Roland at last,
With resolute shoulders, each butting away
The haze, as some bluff river headland its spray.

V.

And his low head and crest, just one sharp ear bent
back
For my voice, and the other pricked out on his track;
And one eye's black intelligence,—ever that glance
O'er its white edge at me, his own master, askance!
And the thick heavy spume-flakes which aye and anon
His fierce lips shook upwards in galloping on.

VI.

By Hasselt, Dirck groaned; and cried Joris, "Stay
spur!
"Your Roos galloped bravely, the fault's not in her,
"We'll remember at Aix"—for one heard the quick
wheeze
Of her chest, saw the stretched neck and staggering
knees,
And sunk tail, and horrible heave of the flank,
As down on her haunches she shuddered and sank.

VII.

So we were left galloping, Joris and I,
Past Looz and past Tongres, no cloud in the sky;
The broad sun above laughed a pitiless laugh,
'Neath our feet broke the brittle bright stubble like
chaff;
Till over by Dalhem a dome-spire sprang white,
And "Gallop," gasped Joris, "for Aix is in sight!"

PICTOR IGNOTUS

VIII.

"How they'll greet us!"—and all in a moment his roar
Rolled neck and croup over, lay dead as a stone;
And there was my Roland to bear the whole weight
Of the news which alone could save Aix from her fate,
With his nostrils like pits full of blood to the brim,
And with circles of red for his eye-sockets' rim.

IX.

Then I cast loose my buffcoat, each holster let fall,
Shook off both my jack-boots, let go belt and all,
Stood up in the stirrup, leaned, patted his ear,
Called my Roland his pet-name, my horse without
peer;
Clapped my hands, laughed and sang, any noise, bad
or good,
Till at length into Aix Roland galloped and stood.

X.

And all I remember is, friends flocking round
As I sate with his head 'twixt my knees on the
ground,
And no voice but was praising this Roland of mine,
As I poured down his throat our last measure of
wine,
Which (the burgesses voted by common consent)
Was no more than his due who brought good news
from Ghent.

PICTOR IGNOTUS

[FLORENCE, 15—.]

I COULD have painted pictures like that youth's
Ye praise so. How my soul springs up! No bar
Stayed me—ah, thought which saddens while it
soothes!—

PICTOR IGNOTUS

Never did fate forbid me, star by star,
To outburst on your night with all my gift
Of fires from God : nor would my flesh have shrunk
From seconding my soul, with eyes uplift
And wide to Heaven, or, straight like thunder, sunk
To the centre, of an instant ; or around
Turned calmly and inquisitive, to scan
The license and the limit, space and bound,
Allowed to Truth made visible in Man.
And, like that youth ye praise so, all I saw,
Over the canvass could my hand have flung,
Each face obedient to its passion's law,
Each passion clear proclaimed without a tongue ;
Whether Hope rose at once in all the blood,
A tip-toe for the blessing of embrace,
Or Rapture drooped the eyes, as when her brood
Pull down the nesting dove's heart to its place,
Or Confidence lit swift the forehead up,
And locked the mouth fast, like a castle braved,—
O Human faces, hath it spilt, my cup?
What did ye give me that I have not saved?
Nor will I say I have not dreamed (how well !)
Of going—I, in each new picture,—forth,
As, making new hearts beat and bosoms swell,
To Pope or Kaiser, East, West, South or North,
Bound for the calmly satisfied great State,
Or glad aspiring little burgh, it went,
Flowers cast upon the car which bore the freight,
Through old streets named afresh from its event,
Till it reached home, where learned Age should greet
My face, and Youth, the star not yet distinct
Above his hair, lie learning at my feet!—
Oh, thus to live, I and my picture, linked
With love about, and praise, till life should end,
And then not go to Heaven, but linger here,
Here on my earth, earth's every man my friend,—
The thought grew frightful, 'twas so wildly dear !
But a voice changed it! Glimpses of such sights
Have scared me, like the revels thro' a door
Of some strange House of Idols at its rites ;

THE ITALIAN IN ENGLAND

This world seemed not the world it was before!
Mixed with my loving trusting ones there trooped
. . . Who summoned those cold faces that begun
To press on me and judge me? Tho' I stooped
Shrinking, as from the soldiery a nun,
They drew me forth, and spite of me . . . enough!
These buy and sell our pictures, take and give,
Count them for garniture and household-stuff,
And where they live our pictures needs must live,
And see their faces, listen to their prate,
Partakers of their daily pettiness,
Discussed of,—“This I love, or this I hate,
“This likes me more, and this affects me less!”
Wherefore I chose my portion. If at whiles
My heart sinks, as monotonous I paint
These endless cloisters and eternal aisles
With the same series, Virgin, Babe, and Saint,
With the same cold, calm, beautiful regard,
At least no merchant traffics in my heart;
The sanctuary's gloom at least shall ward
Vain tongues from where my pictures stand apart;
Only prayer breaks the silence of the shrine
While, blackening in the daily candle-smoke,
They moulder on the damp wall's travertine,
'Mid echoes the light footstep never woke.
So die, my pictures; surely, gently die!
Oh, youth, men praise so,—holds their praise its
worth?
Blown harshly, keeps the trump its golden cry?
Tastes sweet the water with such specks of earth?

THE ITALIAN IN ENGLAND.

That second time they hunted me
From hill to plain, from shore to sea,
And Austria, hounding far and wide
Her blood-hounds thro' the country-side,
Breathed hot and instant on my trace,—

THE ITALIAN IN ENGLAND

I made six days a hiding-place
Of that dry green old aqueduct
Where I and Charles, when boys, have plucked
The fire-flies from the roof above,
Bright creeping thro' the moss they love.
—How long it seems since Charles was lost !
Six days the soldiers crossed and crossed
The country in my very sight ;
And when that peril ceased at night,
The sky broke out in red dismay
With signal-fires ; well, there I lay
Close covered o'er in my recess,
Up to the neck in ferns and cress,
Thinking on Metternich our friend,
And Charles's miserable end,
And much beside, two days ; the third,
Hunger o'ercame me when I heard
The peasants from the village go
To work among the maize ; you know,
With us, in Lombardy, they bring
Provisions packed on mules, a string
With little bells that cheer their task,
And casks, and boughs on every cask
To keep the sun's heat from the wine ;
These I let pass in jingling line,
And, close on them, dear noisy crew,
The peasants from the village, too ;
For at the very rear would troop
Their wives and sisters in a group
To help, I knew ; when these had passed,
I threw my glove to strike the last,
Taking the chance : she did not start,
Much less cry out, but stooped apart
One instant, rapidly glanced round,
And saw me beckon from the ground :
A wild bush grows and hides my crypt ;
She picked my glove up while she stripped
A branch off, then rejoined the rest
With that ; my glove lay in her breast :
Then I drew breath : they disappeared :

THE ITALIAN IN ENGLAND

It was for Italy I feared.

An hour, and she returned alone
Exactly where my glove was thrown.
Meanwhile came many thoughts; on me
Rested the hopes of Italy;
I had devised a certain tale
Which, when 'twas told her, could not fail
Persuade a peasant of its truth;
I meant to call a freak of youth
'This hiding, and give hopes of pay,
And no temptation to betray.
But when I saw that woman's face,
Its calm simplicity of grace,
Our Italy's own attitude
In which she walked thus far, and stood,
Planting each naked foot so firm,
To crush the snake and spare the worm --
At first sight of her eyes, I said,
"I am that man upon whose head
"They fix the price, because I hate
"The Austrians over us: the State
"Will give you gold—oh, gold so much,
"If you betray me to their clutch!
"And be your death, for aught I know,
"If once they find you saved their foe.
"Now, you must bring me food and drink,
"And also paper, pen, and ink,
"And carry safe what I shall write
"To Padua, which you'll reach at night
"Before the Duomo shuts; go in,
"And wait till Tenebræ begin;
"Walk to the third Confessional,
"Between the pillar and the wall,
"And kneeling whisper *whence comes peace?*
"Say it a second time; then cease;
"And if the voice inside returns,
"From Christ and Freedom; what concerns
"The cause of Peace?—for answer, slip
"My letter where you placed your lip;

THE ITALIAN IN ENGLAND

"Then come back happy we have done

"Our mother service—I, the son,

"As you the daughter of our land!"

Three mornings more, she took her stand
In the same place, with the same eyes:

I was no surer of sun-rise

Than of her coming: we conferred

Of her own prospects, and I heard

She had a lover—stout and tall,

She said—then let her eyelids fall,

"He could do much"—as if some doubt

Entered her heart,—then, passing out,

"She could not speak for others—who

"Had other thoughts; herself she knew:"

And so she brought me drink and food.

After four days, the scouts pursued

Another path: at last arrived

The help my Paduan friends contrived

To furnish me: she brought the news:

For the first time I could not choose

But kiss her hand and lay my own

Upon her head—"This faith was shown

"To Italy, our mother;—she

"Uses my hand and blesses thee!"

She followed down to the sea-shore;

I left and never saw her more.

How very long since I have thought

Concerning—much less wished for—ought

Beside the good of Italy

For which I live and mean to die!

I never was in love; and since

Charles proved false, nothing could convince

My inmost heart I had a friend;

However, if I pleased to spend

Real wishes on myself—say, Three—

I know at least what one should be;

I would grasp Metternich until

I felt his red wet throat distil

In blood thro' these two hands: and next,

THE ITALIAN IN ENGLAND

—Nor much for that am I perplexed—
Charles, perjured traitor, for his part,
Should die slow of a broken heart
Under his new employers : last
—Ah, there, what should I wish? For fast
Do I grow old and out of strength.—
If I resolved to seek at length
My father's house again, how scared
They all would look, and unprepared!
My brothers live in Austria's pay
—Disowned me long ago, men say;
And all my early mates who used
To praise me so—perhaps induced
More than one early step of mine—
Are turning wise; while some opine
“Freedom grows License,” some suspect
“Haste breeds Delay,” and recollect
They always said, such premature
Beginnings never could endure!
So, with a sullen “All's for best,”
The land seems settling to its rest.
I think, then, I should wish to stand
This evening in that dear, lost land,
Over the sea the thousand miles,
And know if yet that woman smiles
With the calm smile; some little farm
She lives in there, no doubt; what harm
If I sate on the door-side bench,
And, while her spindle made a trench
Fantastically in the dust,
Inquired of all her fortunes—just
Her children's ages and their names,
And what may be the husband's aims
For each of them—I'd talk this out,
And sit there, for an hour about,
Then kiss her hand once more, and lay
Mine on her head, and go my way.

So much for idle wishing—how
It steals the time! To business now!

THE ENGLISHMAN IN ITALY

THE ENGLISHMAN IN ITALY

[PIANO DI SORRENTO]

FORTÚ, Fortù, my beloved one,
Sit here by my side,
On my knees put up both little feet!
I was sure, if I tried,
I could make you laugh spite of Scirocco:
Now, open your eyes—
Let me keep you amused till he vanish
In black from the skies,
With telling my memories over
As you tell your beads;
All the memories plucked at Sorrento
—The flowers, or the weeds.

Time for rain! for your long hot dry Autumn
Had net-worked with brown
The white skin of each grape on the bunches,
Marked like a quail's crown,
Those creatures you make such account of,
Whose heads,—specked with white
Over brown like a great spider's back,
As I told you last night,—
Your mother bites off for her supper;
Red-ripe as could be.
Pomegranates were chapping and splitting
In halves on the tree:
And betwixt the loose walls of great flintstone,
Or in the thick dust
On the path, or straight out of the rock side,
Wherever could thrust
Some burnt sprig of bold hardy rock-flower
Its yellow face up,
For the prize were great butterflies fighting,
Some five for one cup.
So I guessed, ere I got up this morning,

THE ENGLISHMAN IN ITALY

What change was in store,
By the quick rustle-down of the quail-nets
Which woke me before
I could open my shutter, made fast
With a bough and a stone,
And look thro' the twisted dead vine-twigs,
Sole lattice that's known !
Quick and sharp rang the rings down the net-poles,
While, busy beneath,
Your priest and his brother tugged at them,
The rain in their teeth :
And out upon all the flat house-roofs
Where split figs lay drying,
The girls took the frails under cover :
Nor use seemed in trying
To get out the boats and go fishing,
For, under the cliff,
Fierce the black water frothed o'er the blind-rock.
No seeing our skiff
Arrive about noon from Amalfi,
—Our fisher arrive,
And pitch down his basket before us,
All trembling alive
With pink and grey jellies, your sea-fruit,
—You touch the strange lumps,
And mouths gape there, eyes open, all manner
Of horns and of humps,
Which only the fisher looks grave at,
While round him like imps
Cling screaming the children as naked
And brown as his shrimps ;
Himself too as bare to the middle—
—You see round his neck
The string and its brass coin suspended,
That saves him from wreck.
But to-day not a boat reached Salerno,
So back to a man
Came our friends, with whose help in the vineyards
Grape-harvest began :
In the vat, half-way up in our house-side,

THE ENGLISHMAN IN ITALY

Like blood the juice spins,
While your brother all bare-legged is dancing
Till breathless he grins
Dead-beaten, in effort on effort
To keep the grapes under,
Since still when he seems all but master,
In pours the fresh plunder
From girls who keep coming and going
With basket on shoulder,
And eyes shut against the rain's driving,
Your girls that are older,—
For under the hedges of aloe,
And where, on its bed
Of the orchard's black mould, the love-apple
Lies pulpy and red,
All the young ones are kneeling and filling
Their laps with the snails
Tempted out by this first rainy weather,—
Your best of regales,
As to-night will be proved to my sorrow,
When, supping in state,
We shall feast our grape-gleaners (two dozen,
Three over one plate)
With lasagne so tempting to swallow
In slippery ropes,
And gourds fried in great purple slices,
That colour of popes.
Meantime, see the grape-bunch they've brought
you,—
The rain-water slips
O'er the heavy blue bloom on each globe
Which the wasp to your lips
Still follows with fretful persistence—
Nay, taste, while awake,
This half of a curd-white smooth cheese-ball,
That peels, flake by flake,
Like an onion's, each smoother and whiter ;
Next, sip this weak wine
From the thin green glass flask, with its stopper,
A leaf of the vine,—

THE ENGLISHMAN IN ITALY

And end with the prickly-pear's red flesh
That leaves thro' its juice
The stony black seeds on your pearl-teeth
... Scirocco is loose!
Hark! the quick, whistling pelt of the olives
Which, thick in one's track,
'Tempt the stranger to pick up and bite them,
Tho' not yet half black!
How the old twisted olive trunks shudder!
The medlars let fall
Their hard fruit, and the brittle great fig-trees
Snap off, figs and all,—
For here comes the whole of the tempest!
No refuge, but creep
Back again to my side and my shoulder,
And listen or sleep.

O how will your country show next week,
When all the vine-boughs
Have been stripped of their foliage to pasture
The mules and the cows?
Last eve, I rode over the mountains;
Your brother, my guide,
Soon left me, to feast on the myrtles
That offered, each side,
Their fruit-balls, black, glossy, and luscious,—
Or strip from the sorbs
A treasure, so rosy and wondrous,
Of hairy gold orbs!
But my mule picked his sure, sober path out,
Just stopping to neigh
When he recognised down in the valley
His mates on their way
With the faggots, and barrels of water;
And soon we emerged
From the plain, where the woods could scarce
follow;
And still as we urged
Our way, the woods wondered, and left us,
As up still we trudged

THE ENGLISHMAN IN ITALY

Though the wild path grew wilder each instant,
And place was e'en grudged
'Mid the rock-chasms, and piles of loose stones
(Like the loose broken teeth
Of some monster, which climbed there to die
From the ocean beneath)
Place was grudged to the silver-grey fume-weed
That clung to the path,
And dark rosemary, ever a-dying,
That, 'spite the wind's wrath,
So loves the salt rock's face to seaward,—
And lentisks as staunch
To the stone where they root and bear berries,—
And : . . what shows a branch
Coral-coloured, transparent, with circlets
Of pale seagreen leaves—
Over all trod my mule with the caution
Of gleaners o'er sheaves,
Still, foot after foot like a lady—
So, round after round,
He climbed to the top of Calvano,
And God's own profound
Was above me, and round me the mountains,
And under, the sea,
And within me, my heart to bear witness
What was and shall be !
Oh heaven, and the terrible crystal !
No rampart excludes
Your eye from the life to be lived
In the blue solitudes !
Oh, those mountains, their infinite movement !
Still moving with you—
For, ever some new head and breast of them
Thrusts into view
To observe the intruder—you see it
If quickly you turn
And, before they escape you, surprise them—
They grudge you should learn
How the soft plains they look on, lean over,
And love (they pretend)

THE ENGLISHMAN IN ITALY

—Cower beneath them ; the flat sea-pine crouches,
The wild fruit-trees bend,
E'en the myrtle-leaves curl, shrink and shut—
All is silent and grave—
'Tis a sensual and timorous beauty—
How fair, but a slave!
So, I turned to the sea, —and there slumbered
As greenly as ever
Those isles of the siren, your Galli ;
No ages can sever
The Three, nor enable their sister
To join them,—half way
On the voyage, she looked at Ulysses—
No farther to-day ;
Tho' the small one, just launched in the wave,
Watches breast-high and steady
From under the rock, her bold sister
Swum half-way already.
Fortù, shall we sail there together
And see from the sides
Quite new rocks show their faces—new haunts
Where the siren abides?
Shall we sail round and round them, close over
The rocks, tho' unseen,
That ruffle the gray glassy water
To glorious green?
Then scramble from splinter to splinter,
Reach land and explore,
On the largest, the strange square black turret
With never a door,
Just a loop to admit the quick lizards ;
Then, stand there and hear
The birds' quiet singing, that tells us
What life is, so clear !
The secret they sang to Ulysses,
When, ages ago,
He heard and he knew this life's secret,
I hear and I know !

Ah, see ! The sun breaks o'er Calvano—

THE ENGLISHMAN IN ITALY

He strikes the great gloom
And flutters it o'er the mount's summit
In airy gold fume !
All is over ! Look out, see the gypsy,
Our tinker and smith,
Has arrived, set up bellows and forge,
And down-squatted forthwith
To his hammering, under the wall there ;
One eye keeps aloof
The urchins that itch to be putting
His jews'-harps to proof,
While the other, thro' locks of curled wire,
Is watching how sleek
Shines the hog, come to share in the windfalls
—An abbot's own cheek !
All is over ! Wake up and come out now,
And down let us go,
And see the fine things got in order
At Church for the show
Of the Sacrament, set forth this evening ;
To-morrow's the Feast
Of the Rosary's Virgin, by no means
Of Virgins the least—
As you'll hear in the off-hand discourse
Which (all nature, no art)
The Dominican brother, these three weeks,
Was getting by heart.
Not a post nor a pillar but's dizen'd
With red and blue papers ;
All the roof waves with ribbons, each altar
A-blaze with long tapers ;
But the great masterpiece is the scaffold
Rigged glorious to hold
All the fiddlers and fifiers and drummers,
And trumpeters bold,
Not afraid of Bellini nor Auber,
Who, when the priest's hoarse,
Will strike us up something that's brisk
For the feast's second course.
And then will the flaxen-wigged Image

THE LOST LEADER

Be carried in pomp
Thro' the plain, while in gallant procession
The priests mean to stomp.
And all round the glad church lie old bottles
With gunpowder stopped,
Which will be, when the Image re-enters,
Religiously popped.
And at night from the crest of Calvano
Great bonfires will hang,
On the plain will the trumpets join chorus,
And more poppers bang !
At all events, come—to the garden,
As far as the wall,
See me tap with a hoe on the plaster
Till out there shall fall
A scorpion with wide angry nippers !
. . . "Such trifles"—you say ?
Fortù, in my England at home,
Men meet gravely to-day
And debate, if abolishing Corn-laws
Is righteous and wise
—If 'tis proper, Scirocco should vanish
In black from the skies !

THE LOST LEADER

I.

Just for a handful of silver he left us,
Just for a riband to stick in his coat—
Found the one gift of which fortune bereft us,
Lost all the others she lets us devote ;
They, with the gold to give, doled him out silver,
So much was their's who so little allowed :
How all our copper had gone for his service !
Rags—were they purple, his heart had been proud !
We that had loved him so, followed him, honoured
him,
Lived in his mild and magnificent eye,

THE LOST MISTRESS

Learned his great language, caught his clear accents,
Made him our pattern to live and to die !
Shakespeare was of us, Milton was for us,
Burns, Shelley, were with us,—they watch from
their graves !

He alone breaks from the van and the freemen,
He alone sinks to the rear and the slaves !

II.

We shall march prospering,—not thro' his presence ;
Songs may inspirit us,—not from his lyre ;
Deeds will be done,—while he boasts his quiescence,
Still bidding crouch whom the rest bade aspire :
Blot out his name, then,—record one lost soul more,
One task more declined, one more footpath untrod,
One more triumph for devils, and sorrow for angels,
One wrong more to man, one more insult to God !
Life's night begins : let him never come back to us !
There would be doubt, hesitation and pain,
Forced praise on our part—the glimmer of twilight,
Never glad confident morning again !
Best fight on well, for we taught him,—strike
gallantly,
Aim at our heart ere we pierce through his own ;
Then let him receive the new knowledge and wait us,
Pardoned in Heaven, the first by the throne !

THE LOST MISTRESS

I.

ALL'S over, then—does truth sound bitter
As one at first believes ?
Hark, 'tis the sparrows' good-night twitter
About your cottage eaves !

II.

And the leaf-buds on the vine are woolly,
I noticed that, to-day ;

HOME-THOUGHTS, FROM ABROAD

One day more bursts them open fully
—You know the red turns gray.

III.

To-morrow we meet the same then, dearest?
May I take your hand in mine?
More friends are we,—well, friends the merest
Keep much that I'll resign :

IV.

For each glance of that eye so bright and black,
Though I keep with heart's endeavour,—
Your voice, when you wish the snowdrops back,
Though it stays in my soul for ever!—

V.

—Yet I will but say what mere friends say,
Or only a thought stronger;
I will hold your hand but as long as all may,
Or so very little longer!

HOME-THOUGHTS, FROM ABROAD

I.

OH, to be in England
Now that April's there,
And whoever wakes in England
Sees, some morning, unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brush-wood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England—now!

II.

And after April, when May follows,
And the whitethroat builds, and all the swallows—
Hark! where my blossomed pear-tree in the hedge
Leans to the field and scatters on the clover

HOME-THOUGHTS, FROM THE SEA

Blossoms and dewdrops—at the bent-spray's edge—
That's the wise thrush; he sings each song twice over,
Lest you should think he never could recapture
The first fine careless rapture!
And though the fields look rough with hoary dew,
All will be gay when noontide wakes anew
The buttercups, the little children's dower,
—Far brighter than this gaudy melon-flower!

III.

Here's to Nelson's memory!
'Tis the second time that I, at sea,
Right off Cape Trafalgar here,
Have drunk it deep in British beer:
Nelson for ever—any time
Am I his to command in prose or rhyme!
Give me of Nelson only a touch,
And I guard it, be it little or much;
Here's one the Captain gives, and so
Down at the word, by George, shall it go!
He says that at Greenwich they show the beholder
Nelson's coat, "still with tar on the shoulder,
"For he used to lean with one shoulder digging,
"Jigging, as it were, and zig-zag-zigging,
"Up against the mizen rigging!"

HOME-THOUGHTS, FROM THE SEA

NOBLY, nobly Cape Saint Vincent to the north-west
died away;
Sunset ran, one glorious blood-red, reeking into Cadiz
Bay;
Bluish mid the burning water, full in face Trafalgar
lay;
In the dimmest north-east distance, dawned Gibraltar
grand and gray;
"Here and here did England help me,—how can I
help England?"—say,

NATIONALITY IN DRINKS

Whoso turns as I, this evening, turn to God to praise
and pray,
While Jove's planet rises yonder, silent over Africa.

NATIONALITY IN DRINKS

I.

My heart sunk with our Claret-flask,
Just now, beneath the heavy sedges
That serve this pond's black face for mask;
And still at yonder broken edges
Of the hole, where up the bubbles glisten,
After my heart I look and listen.

II.

Our laughing little flask, compell'd
Thro' depth to depth more bleak and shady;
As when, both arms beside her held,
Feet straightened out, some gay French lady
Is caught up from Life's light and motion,
And dropped into Death's silent ocean!

Up jumped Tokay on our table,
Like a pygmy castle-warder,
Dwarfish to see, but stout and able,
Arms and accoutrements all in order;
And fierce he looked north, then, wheeling south,
Blew with his bugle a challenge to Drouth,
Cocked his flap-hat with the tosspot-feather,
Twisted his thumb in his red moustache,
Jingled his huge brass spurs together,
Tightened his waist with its Buda sash,
And then with an impudence nought could abash,
Shrugged his hump-shoulder,
To tell the beholder
For twenty such knaves he should laugh but the
bolder,

THE BISHOP ORDERS HIS TOMB

And so with his sword-hilt gallantly jutting,
And dexter-hand on his haunch abutting,
Went the little man from Ausbruch, strutting!

THE BISHOP ORDERS HIS TOMB AT ST. PRAXED'S CHURCH

[ROME, 15—.]

VANITY, saith the preacher, vanity!
Draw round my bed: is Anselm keeping back?
Nephews—sons mine . . . ah God, I know not!
Well—

She, men would have to be your mother once,
Old Gandolf envied me, so fair she was!
What's done is done, and she is dead beside,
Dead long ago, and I am bishop since,
And as she died so must we die ourselves,
And thence ye may perceive the world's a dream.
Life, how and what is it? As here I lie
In this state-chamber, dying by degrees,
Hours and long hours in the dead night, I ask
"Do I live, am I dead?" Peace, peace seems all.
St. Praxed's ever was the church for peace;
And so, about this tomb of mine. I fought
With tooth and nail to save my niche, ye know:
—Old Gandolf cozened me, despite my care;
Shrewd was that snatch from out the corner South
He graced his carrion with, God curse the same!
Yet still my niche is not so cramped but thence
One sees the pulpit o' the epistle-side,
And somewhat of the choir, those silent seats,
And up into the aery dome where live
The angels, and a sunbeam's sure to lurk:
And I shall fill my slab of basalt there,
And 'neath my tabernacle take my rest,
With those nine columns round me, two and two,

THE BISHOP ORDERS HIS TOMB

The odd one at my feet where Anselm stands :
Peach-blossom marble all, the rare, the ripe
As fresh-poured red wine of a mighty pulse
—Old Gandolf with his paltry onion-stone,
Put me where I may look at him! True peach,
Rosy and flawless: how I earned the prize!
Draw close: that conflagration of my church
—What then? So much was saved if aught were
missed!

My sons, ye would not be my death? Go dig
The white-grape vineyard where the oil-press stood,
Drop water gently till the surface sinks,
And if ye find . . . Ah, God I know not, I! . . .
Bedded in store of rotten figleaves soft,
And corded up in a tight olive-frail,
Some lump, ah God, of *lapis lazuli*,
Big as a Jew's head cut off at the nape,
Blue as a vein o'er the Madonna's breast . . .
Sons, all have I bequeathed you, villas, all,
That brave Frascati villa with its bath,
So, let the blue lump poise between my knees,
Like God the Father's globe on both his hands
Ye worship in the Jesu Church so gay,
For Gandolf shall not choose but see and burst!
Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years :
Man goeth to the grave, and where is he?
Did I say basalt for my slab, sons? Black—
'Twas ever antique-black I meant! How else
Shall ye contrast my frieze to come beneath?
The bas-relief in bronze ye promised me,
Those Pans and Nymphs ye wot of, and perchance
Some tripod, thyrsus, with a vase or so,
The Saviour at his sermon on the mount,
St. Praxed in a glory, and one Pan
Ready to twitch the Nymph's last garment off,
And Moses with the tables . . . but I know
Ye mark me not! What do they whisper thee,
Child of my bowels, Anselm? Ah, ye hope
To revel down my villas while I gasp
Bricked o'er with beggar's mouldy travertine

THE BISHOP ORDERS HIS TOMB

Which Gandolf from his tomb-top chuckles at!
Nay, boys, ye love me—all of jasper, then!
'Tis jasper ye stand pledged to, lest I grieve
My bath must needs be left behind, alas!
One block, pure green as a pistachio-nut,
There's plenty jasper somewhere in the world—
And have I not St. Praxed's ear to pray
Horses for ye, and brown Greek manuscripts,
And mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs?
—That's if ye carve my epitaph aright,
Choice Latin, picked phrase, Tully's every word,
No gaudy ware like Gandolf's second line—
Tully, my masters? Ulpian serves his need!
And then how I shall lie through centuries,
And hear the blessed mutter of the mass,
And see God made and eaten all day long,
And feel the steady candle-flame, and taste
Good strong thick stupifying incense-smoke!
For as I lie here, hours of the dead night,
Dying in state and by such slow degrees,
I fold my arms as if they clasped a crook,
And stretch my feet forth straight as stone can point,
And let the bedclothes for a morteloth drop
Into great laps and folds of sculptor's-work:
And as yon tapers dwindle, and strange thoughts
Grow, with a certain humming in my ears,
About the life before I lived this life,
And this life too, Popes, Cardinals and Priests,
St. Praxed at his sermon on the mount,
Your tall pale mother with her talking eyes,
And new-found agate urns as fresh as day,
And marble's language, Latin pure, discreet,
—Aha, ELUCESCEBAT quoth our friend?
No Tully, said I, Ulpian at the best!
Evil and brief hath been my pilgrimage.
All *lapis*, all, sons! Else I give the Pope
My villas: will ye ever eat my heart?
Ever your eyes were as a lizard's quick,
They glitter like your mother's for my soul,
Or ye would heighten my impoverished frieze,

GARDEN-FANCIES

Piece out its starved design, and fill my vase
With grapes, and add a vizor and a Term,
And to the tripod ye would tie a lynx
That in his struggle throws the thyrsus down,
To comfort me on my entablature
Whereon I am to lie till I must ask
“Do I live, am I dead?” There, leave me, there!
For ye have stabbed me with ingratitude
To death—ye wish it—God, ye wish it! Stone—
Gritstone, a-crumble! Clammy squares which sweat
As if the corpse they keep were oozing through—
And no more *lapis* to delight the world!
Well, go! I bless ye. Fewer tapers there,
But in a row: and, going, turn your backs
—Ay, like departing altar-ministrants,
And leave me in my church, the church for peace,
That I may watch at leisure if he leers—
Old Gandolf, at me, from his onion-stone,
As still he envied me, so fair she was!

GARDEN-FANCIES

I.—THE FLOWER’S NAME

I.

HERE’S the garden she walked across,
Arm in my arm, such a short while since:
Hark, now I push its wicket, the moss
Hinders the hinges and makes them wince!
She must have reached this shrub ere she turned,
As back with that murmur the wicket swung;
For she laid the poor snail, my chance foot spurned,
To feed and forget it the leaves among.

II.

Down this side of the gravel-walk
She went while her robe’s edge brushed the box:
And here she paused in her gracious talk
To point me a moth on the milk white flox.

GARDEN-FANCIES

Roses, ranged in valiant row,

I will never think that she passed you by !

She loves you noble roses, I know ;

But yonder, see, where the rock-plants lie!

III.

This flower she stopped at, finger on lip,

Stooped over, in doubt, as settling its claim ;

Till she gave me, with pride to make no slip,

Its soft meandering Spanish name.

What a name ! was it love, or praise ?

Speech half-asleep, or song half-awake ?

I must learn Spanish, one of these days,

Only for that slow sweet name's sake.

IV.

Roses, if I live and do well,

I may bring her, one of these days,

To fix you fast with as fine a spell,

Fit you each with his Spanish phrase !

But do not detain me now ; for she lingers

There, like sunshine over the ground,

And ever I see her soft white fingers

Searching after the bud she found.

V.

Flower, you Spaniard, look that you grow not,

Stay as you are and be loved for ever !

Bud, if I kiss you 'tis that you blow not,

Mind, the shut pink mouth opens never !

For while thus it pouts, her fingers wrestle,

Twinkling the audacious leaves between,

Till round they turn and down they nestle—

Is not the dear mark still to be seen ?

VI.

Where I find her not, beauties vanish ;

Whither I follow her, beauties flee ;

Is there no method to tell her in Spanish

June's twice June since she breathed it with me ?

GARDEN-FANCIES

Come, bud, show me the least of her traces,
Treasure my lady's lightest foot-fall
—Ah, you may flout and turn up your faces—
Roses, you are not so fair after all!

II.—SIBRANDUS SCHAFNABURGENSIS

I.

Plague take all your pedants, say I!
He who wrote what I hold in my hand,
Centuries back was so good as to die,
Leaving this rubbish to cumber the land;
This, that was a book in its time,
Printed on paper and bound in leather,
Last month in the white of a matin-prime
Just when the birds sang all together.

II.

Into the garden I brought it to read,
And under the arbuté and laurustine
Read it, so help me grace in my need,
From title-page to closing line.
Chapter on chapter did I count,
As a curious traveller counts Stonehenge;
Added up the mortal amount;
And then proceeded to my revenge.

III.

Yonder's a plum-tree, with a crevice
An owl would build in, were he but sage;
For a lap of moss, like a fine pont-levis
In a castle of the middle age,
Joins to a lip of gum, pure amber;
When he'd be private, there might he spend
Hours alone in his lady's chamber:
Into this crevice I dropped our friend.

IV.

Splash, went he, as under he ducked,
—I knew at the bottom rain drippings stagnate;

GARDEN-FANCIES

Next a handful of blossoms I plucked
To bury him with, my bookshelf's magnate;
Then I went in-doors, brought out a loaf,
Half a cheese, and a bottle of Chablis;
Lay on the grass and forgot the oaf
Over a jolly chapter of Rabelais.

V.

Now, this morning, betwixt the moss
And gum that locked our friend in limbo,
A spider had spun his web across,
And sate in the midst with arms a-kimbo:
So, I took pity, for learning's sake,
And, *de profundis, accentibus lœtis*,
Cantate! quoth I, as I got a rake,
And up I fished his delectable treatise.

VI.

Here you have it, dry in the sun,
With all the binding all of a blister,
And great blue spots where the ink has run,
And reddish streaks that wink and glister
O'er the page so beautifully yellow—
Oh, well have the droppings played their tricks!
Did he guess how toadstools grow, this fellow?
Here's one stuck in his chapter six!

VII.

How did he like it when the live creatures
Tickled and toused and browsed him all over,
And worm, slug, eft, with serious features,
Came in, each one, for his right of trover;
When the water-beetle with great blind deaf face
Made of her eggs the stately deposit,
And the newt borrowed just so much of the preface
As tiled in the top of his black wife's closet.

VIII.

All that life, and fun, and romping,
All that frisking, and twisting, and coupling,

THE LABORATORY

While slowly our poor friend's leaves were swamping,
And clasps were cracking, and covers suppling!
As if you had carried sour John Knox
To the play-house at Paris, Vienna, or Munich,
Fastened him into a front-row box,
And danced off the Ballet with trousers and tunic.

IX.

Come, old Martyr! What, torment enough is it?
Back to my room shall you take your sweet self!
Good-bye, mother-beetle; husband-est, *sufficit!*
See the snug niche I have made on my shelf:
A.'s book shall prop you up, B.'s shall cover you,
Here's C. to be grave with, or D. to be gay,
And with E. on each side, and F. right over you,
Dry-rot at ease till the Judgment-day!

THE LABORATORY

[ANCIEN RÉGIME.]

I.

Now that I, tying thy glass mask tightly,
May gaze thro' these faint smokes curling whitely,
As thou pliest thy trade in this devil's-smithy—
Which is the poison to poison her, prithee?

II.

He is with her; and they know that I know
Where they are, what they do: they believe my tears
flow
While they laugh, laugh at me, at me fled to the drear
Empty church, to pray God in, for them!—I am here.

III.

Grind away, moisten and mash up thy paste,
Pound at thy powder,—I am not in haste!
Better sit thus, and observe thy strange things,
Than go where men wait me and dance at the King's.

THE LABORATORY

IV.

That in the mortar—you call it a gum?
Ah, the brave tree whence such gold oozings come!
And yonder soft phial, the exquisite blue,
Sure to taste sweetly,—is that poison too?

V.

Had I but all of them, thee and thy treasures,
What a wild crowd of invisible pleasures!
To carry pure death in an carring, a casket,
A signet, a fan-mount, a fillagree-basket!

VI.

Soon, at the King's, a mere lozenge to give
And Pauline should have just thirty minutes to live!
But to light a pastile, and Elise, with her head,
And her breast, and her arms, and her hands, should
drop dead!

VII.

Quick—is it finished? The colour's too grim!
Why not soft like the phial's, enticing and dim?
Let it brighten her drink, let her turn it and stir,
And try it and taste, ere she fix and prefer!

VIII.

What a drop! She's not little, no minion like me—
That's why she ensnared him: this never will free
The soul from those strong, great eyes,—say, “no!”
To that pulse's magnificent come-and-go.

IX.

For only last night, as they whispered, I brought
My own eyes to bear on her so, that I thought
Could I keep them one half minute fixed, she would fall,
Shrivelled; she fell not; yet this does it all!

X.

Not that I bid you spare her the pain!
Let death be felt and the proof remain;

THE CONFESSIONAL

Brand, burn up, bite into its grace—
He is sure to remember her dying face!

XI.

Is it done? Take my mask off! Nay, be not morose,
It kills her, and this prevents seeing it close:
The delicate droplet, my whole fortune's fee—
If it hurts her, beside, can it ever hurt me?

XII.

Now, take all my jewels, gorge gold to your fill,
You may kiss me, old man, on my mouth if you will!
But brush this dust off me, lest horror it brings
Ere I know it—next moment I dance at the King's!

THE CONFESSIONAL

[SPAIN.]

I.

It is a lie—their Priests, their Pope,
Their Saints, their . . . all they fear or hope
Are lies, and lies—there! thro' my door
And ceiling, there! and walls and floor,
There, lies, they lie, shall still be hurled,
Till spite of them I reach the world!

II.

You think Priests just and holy men!
Before they put me in this den,
I was a human creature too,
With flesh and blood like one of you,
A girl that laughed in beauty's pride
Like lilies in your world outside.

III.

I had a lover—shame avaunt!
This poor wrenched body, grim and gaunt,
Was kissed all over till it burned,

THE CONFESSIONAL.

By lips the truest, love e'er turned
His heart's own tint: one night they kissed
My soul out in a burning mist.

IV.

So, next day when the accustomed train
Of things grew round my sense again,
"That is a sin," I said—and slow
With downcast eyes to church I go,
And pass to the confession-chair,
And tell the old mild father there.

V.

But when I faulted Beltran's name,
"Ha?" quoth the father; "much I blame
"The sin; yet wherefore idly grieve?
"Despair not,—strenuously retrieve!
"Nay, I will turn this love of thine
"To lawful love, almost divine.

VI.

"For he is young, and led astray,
"This Beltran, and he schemes, men say,
"To change the laws of church and state;
"So, thine shall be an angel's fate,
"Who, ere the thunder breaks, should roll
"Its cloud away and save his soul.

VII.

"For, when he lies upon thy breast,
"Thou mayst demand and be possessed
"Of all his plans, and next day steal
"To me, and all those plans reveal,
"That I and every priest, to purge
"His soul, may fast and use the scourge."

VIII.

That father's beard was long and white,
With love and truth his brow seemed bright;
I went back, all on fire with joy,

THE CONFESSIONAL

And, that same evening, bade the boy,
Tell me, as lovers should, heart-free,
Something to prove his love of me.

IX.

He told me what he would not tell
For hope of heaven or fear of Hell;
And I lay listening in such pride,
And, soon as he had left my side,
Tripped to the church by morning-light
To save his soul in his despite.

X.

I told the father all his schemes,
Who were his comrades, what their dreams;
“And now make haste,” I said, “to pray
“The one spot from his soul away;
“To-night he comes, but not the same
“Will look!” At night he never came.

XI.

Nor next night: on the after-morn,
I went forth with a strength new-born:
The church was empty; something drew
My steps into the street; I knew
It led me to the market-place—
Where, lo,—on high—the father’s face!

XII.

That horrible black scaffold drest—
The stapled block . . God sink the rest!
That head strapped back, that blinding vest,
Those knotted hands and naked breast—
Till near one busy hangman pressed—
And—on the neck these arms caressed. . . .

XIII

No part in aught they hope or fear!
No Heaven with them, no Hell,—and here,
No Earth, not so much space as pens

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

My body in their worst of dens
But shall bear God and Man my cry—
Lies—lies, again—and still, they lie !

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

I.

You'RE my friend :
I was the man the Duke spoke to ;
I helped the Duchess to cast off his yoke, too ;
So, here's the tale from beginning to end,
My friend !

II.

Ours is a great wild country :
If you climb to our castle's top,
I don't see where your eye can stop ;
For when you've passed the corn-field country,
Where vineyards leave off, flocks are packed,
And sheep-range leads to cattle-tract,
And cattle-tract to open-chase,
And open-chase to the very base
Of the mountain, where, at a funeral pace,
Round about, solemn and slow,
One by one, row after row,
Up and up the pine-trees go,
So, like black priests up, and so
Down the other side again
To another greater, wilder country,
That's one vast red drear burnt-up plain,
Branched thro' and thro' with many a vein
Whence iron's dug, and copper's dealt ;
Look right, look left, look straight before,—
Beneath they mine, above they smelt,
Copper-ore and iron-ore,
And forge and furnace mould and melt,
And so on, more and ever more,
Till, at the last, for a bounding belt,

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

Comes the salt sand hoar of the great sea shore,
—And the whole is our Duke's country!

III.

I was born the day this present Duke was—
(And O, says the song, ere I was old!)
In the castle where the other Duke was—
(When I was hopeful and young, not old!,
I in the Kennel, he in the Bower:
We are of like age to an hour.
My father was Huntsman in that day;
Who has not heard my father say
That, when a boar was brought to bay,
Three times, four times out of five,
With his huntspear he'd contrive
To get the killing-place transfixed,
And pin him true, both eyes betwixt?
And that's why the old Duke had rather
Have lost a salt-pit than my father,
And loved to have him ever in call;
That's why my father stood in the hall
When the old Duke brought his infant out
To show the people, and while they passed
The wondrous bantling round about,
Was first to start at the outside blast
As the Kaiser's courier blew his horn,
Just a month after the babe was born.
"And" quoth the Kaiser's courier, "since
"The Duke has got an Heir, our Prince
"Needs the Duke's self at his side:"
The Duke looked down and seemed to wince,
But he thought of wars o'er the world wide,
Castles a-fire, men on their march,
The toppling tower, the crashing arch;
And up he looked, and awhile he eyed
The row of crests and shields and banners,
Of all achievements after all manners,
And "ay," said the Duke with a surly pride.
The more was his comfort when he died
At next year's end, in a velvet suit,

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

With a gilt glove on his hand, and his foot
In a silken shoe for a leather boot,
Petticoated like a herald,
In a chamber next to an ante-room,
Where he breathed the breath of page and groom,
What he called stink, and they, perfume :
—They should have set him on red Berold,
Mad with pride, like fire to manage!
They should have got his cheek fresh tannage
Such a day as to-day in the merry sunshine!
Had they stuck on his fist a rough-foot merlin!
—Hark, the wind's on the heath at its game!
Oh for a noble falcon-lanner
To flap each broad wing like a banner,
And turn in the wind, and dance like flame!)
Had they broached a cask of white beer from Berlin!
—Or if you incline to prescribe mere wine—
Put to his lips when they saw him pine,
A cup of our own Moldavia fine,
Cotnar, for instance, green as May sorrel,
And ropy with sweet,—we shall not quarrel

IV.

So, at home, the sick tall yellow Duchess
Was left with the infant in her clutches,
She being the daughter of God knows who:
And now was the time to revisit her tribe,
So, abroad and afar they went, the two,
And let our people rail and gibe
At the empty Hall and extinguished fire,
As loud as we liked, but ever in vain,
Till after long years we had our desire,
And back came the Duke and his mother again.

V.

And he came back the pertest little ape
That ever affronted human shape;
Full of his travel, struck at himself—
You'd say, ne despised our bluff old ways
—Not he! For in Paris they told the elf

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

That our rough North land was the Land of Lays,
The one good thing left in evil days;
Since the Mid-Age was the Heroic Time,
And only in wild nooks like ours
Could you taste of it yet as in its prime,
And see true castles, with proper towers,
Young-hearted women, old-minded men,
And manners now as manners were then.
So, all that the old Dukes had been, without knowing
it,

This Duke would fain know he was, without being it;
'Twas not for the joy's self, but the joy of his show-
ing it,

Nor for the pride's self, but the pride of our seeing it,
He revived all usages thoroughly worn-out,
The souls of them fumed-forth, the hearts of them
torn-out :

And chief in the chase his neck he perilled,
On a lathy horse, all legs and length,
With blood for bone, all speed, no strength;
—They should have set him on red Berold,
With the red eye slow consuming in fire,
And the thin stiff ear like an abbey spire!

VI.

Well, such as he was, he must marry, we heard :
And out of a convent, at the word,
Came the Lady, in time of spring.
—Oh, old thoughts they cling, they cling!
That day, I know, with a dozen oaths
I clad myself in thick hunting-clothes
Fit for the chase of urox or bufile
In winter-time when you need to muffle:
But the Duke had a mind we should cut a figure,
And so we saw the Lady arrive :
My friend, I have seen a white crane bigger!
She was the smallest lady alive,
Made, in a piece of Nature's madness,
Too small, almost, for the life and gladness
That over-filled her, as some hive

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

Out of the bears' reach on the high trees
Is crowded with its safe merry bees :
In truth, she was not hard to please !
Up she looked, down she looked, round at the mead,
Straight at the castle, that's best indeed
To look at from outside the walls :
As for us, styled the "serfs and thralls,"
She as much thanked me as if she had said it,
(With her eyes, do you understand ?)
Because I patted her horse while I led it ;
And Max, who rode on her other hand,
Said, no bird flew past but she enquired
What its true name was, nor ever seemed tired—
If that was an eagle she saw hover,—
If the green and gray bird on the field was the
plover.

When suddenly appeared the Duke,
And as down she sprung, the small foot pointed
On to my hand,—as with a rebuke,
And as if his backbone were not jointed,
The Duke stepped rather aside than forward,
And welcomed her with his grandest smile ;
And, mind you, his mother all the while
Chilled in the rear, like a wind to Nor'ward ;
And up, like a weary yawn, with its pullies
Went, in a shriek, the rusty portcullis ;
And, like a glad sky the north-wind sullies,
The Lady's face stopped its play,
As if her first hair had grown grey—
For such things must begin some one day !

VII.

In a day or two she was well again ;
As who should say, " You labour in vain !
" This is all a jest against God, who meant
" I should ever be, as I am, content
" And glad in his sight ; therefore, glad I will be ! "
So, smiling as at first went she.

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

VIII.

She was active, stirring, all fire—
Could not rest, could not tire—
To a stone she had given life!
(I myself loved once, in my day,)
—For a Shepherd's, Miner's, Huntsman's wife,
(I had a wife, I know what I say,)
Never in all the world such an one!
And here was plenty to be done,
And she that could do it, great or small,
She was to do nothing at all.
There was already this man in his post,
This in his station, and that in his office,
And the Duke's plan admitted a wife, at most,
To meet his eye, with the other trophies,
Now outside the Hall, now in it,
To sit thus, stand thus, see and be seen,
At the proper place in the proper minute,
And die away the life between.
And it was amusing enough, each infraction
Of rule (but for after-sadness that came)
To hear the consummate self-satisfaction
With which the young Duke and the old Dame
Would let her advise, and criticise,
And, being a fool, instruct the wise,
And, child-like, parcel out praise or blame:
They bore it all in complacent guise,
As tho' an artificer, after contriving
A wheel-work image as if it were living,
Should find with delight it could motion to strike
him!
So found the Duke, and his mother like him,—
The Lady hardly got a rebuff—
That had not been contemptuous enough,
With his cursed smirk, as he nodded applause,
And kept off the old mother-cat's claws.

IX.

So, the little Lady grew silent and thin,
Paling and ever paling,

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

As the way is with a hid chagrin;
And the Duke perceived that she was ailing,
And said in his heart, "'Tis done to spite me,
"But I shall find in my power to right me!"
Don't swear, friend—the Old One, many a year,
Is in Hell, and the Duke's self . . . you shall hear.

X.

Well, early in autumn, at first winter-warning,
When the stag had to break with his foot, of a
morning,
A drinking-hole out of the fresh tender ice
That covered the pond till the sun, in a trice,
Loosening it, let out a ripple of gold,
And another and another, and faster and faster,
Till, dimpling to blindness, the wide water rolled:
Then it so chanced that the Duke our master
Asked himself what were the pleasures in season,
And found, since the calendar bade him be hearty,
He should do the Middle Age no treason
In resolving on a hunting-party.
Always provided, old books showed the way of it!
What meant old poets by their strictures?
And when old poets had said their say of it,
How taught old painters in their pictures?
We must revert to the proper channels,
Workings in tapestry, paintings on pannels,
And gather up Woodcraft's authentic traditions:
Here was food for our various ambitions,
As on each case, exactly stated,
—To encourage your dog, now, the properest chirrup,
Or best prayer to St. Hubert on mounting your
stirrup—
We of the household took thought and debated.
Blessed was he whose back ached with the jerkin
His sire was wont to do forest-work in;
Blesseder he who nobly sunk "ohs"
And "ahs" while he tugged on his grandsire's trunk-
hose;
What signified hats if they had no rims on,

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

Each slouching before and behind like the scallop,
And able to serve at sea for a shallop,
Loaded with lacquer and looped with crimson?
So that the deer now, to make a short rhyme on't,
What with our Venerers, Prickers, and Verderers,
Might hope for real hunters at length, and not
murderers,
And oh, the Duke's tailor—he had a hot time on't!

XI.

Now you must know, that when the first dizziness
Of flap-hats and buff-coats and jackboots subsided,
The Duke put this question, "The Duke's part provided,
"Had not the Duchess some share in the business?"
For out of the mouth of two or three witnesses,
Did he establish all fit-or-unfitnesses:
And, after much laying of heads together,
Somebody's cap got a notable feather
By the announcement with proper unction
That he had discovered the lady's function;
Since ancient authors held this tenet,
"When horns wind a mort and the deer is at seige,
"Let the dame of the Castle prick forth on her jennet,
"And with water to wash the hands of her liege
"In a clean ewer with a fair toweling,
"Let her preside at the disemboweling."
Now, my friend, if you had so little religion
As to catch a hawk, some falcon-lanner,
And thrust her broad wings like a banner
Into a coop for a vulgar pigeon;
And if day by day, and week by week,
You cut her claws, and sealed her eyes,
And clipped her wings, and tied her beak,
Would it cause you any great surprise
If when you decided to give her an airing
You found she needed a little preparing?
—I say, should you be such a curmudgeon,
If she clung to the perch, as to take it in dudgeon?
Yet when the Duke to his lady signified,

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

Just a day before, as he judged most dignified,
In what a pleasure she was to participate,—
And, instead of leaping wide in flashes,
Her eyes just lifted their long lashes,
As if pressed by fatigue even he could not dissipate,
And duly acknowledged the Duke's forethought,
But spoke of her health, if her health were worth aught,
Of the weight by day and the watch by night,
And much wrong now that used to be right,
So, thanking him, declined the hunting,—
Was conduct ever more affronting?
With all the ceremony settled—
With the towel ready, and the sewer
Polishing up his oldest ewer,
And the jennet pitched upon, a piebald,
Black-barred, cream-coated and pink eye-ball'd,—
No wonder if the Duke was nettled!
And when she persisted nevertheless,—
Well, I suppose here's the time to confess
That there ran half round our Lady's chamber
A balcony none of the hardest to clamber;
And that Jacynth the tire-woman, ready in waiting,
Stayed in call outside, what need of relating?
And since Jacynth was like a June rose, why, a fervent
Adorer of Jacynth, of course, was your servant;
And if she had the habit to peep through the casement,
How could I keep at any vast distance?
And so, as I say, on the Lady's persistence,
The Duke, dumb stricken with amazement,
Stood for awhile in a sultry smother,
And then, with a smile that partook of the awful,
Turned her over to his yellow mother
To learn what was decorous and lawful;
And the mother smelt blood with a cat-like instinct,
As her cheek quick whitened thro' all its quince-tinct—
Oh, but the Lady heard the whole truth at once!
What meant she?—Who was she?—Her duty and
station,
The wisdom of age and the folly of youth, at once,
Its decent regard and its fitting relation—

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

In brief, my friend, set all the devils in hell free
And turn them out to carouse in a belfry,
And treat the priests to a fifty-part canon,
And then you may guess how that tongue of hers
ran on!

Well, somehow or other it ended at last
And, licking her whiskers, out she passed;
And after her,—making (he hoped) a face
Like Emperor Nero or Sultan Saladin,
Stalked the Duke's self with the austere grace
Of ancient hero or modern paladin,—
From door to staircase—oh, such a solemn
Unbending of the vertebral column!

XII.

However, at sunrise our company mustered,
And here was the huntsman bidding unkennel,
And there 'neath his bonnet the pricker blustered,
With feather dank as a bough of wet fennel;
For the court-yard's four walls were filled with fog
You might cut as an axe chops a log.
Like so much wool for colour and bulkiness;
And out rode the Duke in a perfect sulkiness,
Since before breakfast, a man feels but queasily,
And a sinking at the lower abdomen
Begins the day with indifferent omen:
And lo, as he looked around uneasily,
The sun ploughed the fog up and drove it asunder
This way and that from the valley under;
And, looking thro' the court-yard arch,
Down in the valley, what should meet him
But a troop of Gypsies on their march,
No doubt with the annual gifts to greet him.

XIII.

Now, in your land, Gypsies reach you, only
After reaching all lands beside;
North they go, south they go, trooping or lonely,
And still, as they travel far and wide,
Catch they and keep now a trace here, a trace there,

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

That puts you in mind of a place here, a place there :
But with us, I believe they rise out of the ground,
And nowhere else, I take it, are found
With the earth-tint yet so freshly embrowned ;
Born, no doubt, like insects which breed on
The very fruit they are meant to feed on :
For the earth—not a use to which they don't turn it,
The ore that grows in the mountain's womb,
Or the sand in the pits like a honeycomb,
They sift and soften it, bake it and burn it—
Whether they weld you, for instance, a snaffle
With side-bars never a brute can baffle ;
Or a lock that's a puzzle of wards within wards ;
Or, if your colt's fore-foot inclines to curve inwards,
Horseshoes they'll hammer which turn on a swivel
And won't allow the hoof to shrivel ;
Then they cast bells like the shell of the winkle,
That keep a stout heart in the ram with their tinkle :
But the sand—they pinch and pound it like otters ;
Commend me to Gypsy glass-makers and potters !
Glasses they'll blow you, crystal-clear,
Where just a faint cloud of rose shall appear,
As if in pure water you dropped and let die
A bruised black-blooded mulberry ;
And that other sort, their crowning pride,
With long white threads distinct inside,
Like the lake-flower's fibrous roots which dangle
Loose such a length and never tangle,
Where the bold sword-lily cuts the clear waters,
And the cup-lily couches with all the white daughters :
Such are the works they put their hand to,
And the uses they turn and twist iron and sand to.
And these made the troop which our Duke saw sally
Towards his castle from out of the valley,
Men and women, like new-hatched spiders,
Come out with the morning to greet our riders ;
And up they wound till they reached the ditch,
Whereat all stopped save one, a witch,
That I knew, as she hobbled from the group,
By her gait, directly, and her stoop,

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

I, whom Jacynth was used to importune
To let that same witch tell us our fortune.
The oldest Gypsy then above ground ;
And, so sure as the autumn season came round,
She paid us a visit for profit or pastime,
And every time, as she swore, for the last time.
And presently she was seen to sidle
Up to the Duke till she touched his bridle,
So that the horse of a sudden reared up
As under its nose the old witch peered up
With her worn-out eyes, or rather eye-holes
Of no use now but to gather brine,
And began a kind of level whine
Such as they used to sing to their viols
When their ditties they go grinding
Up and down with nobody minding :
And, then as of old, at the end of the humming
Her usual presents were forthcoming
—A dog-whistle blowing the fiercest of trebles,
(Just as a sea-shore stone holding a dozen fine pebbles,)
Or a porcelain mouth-piece to screw on a pipe-end,—
And so she awaited her annual stipend.
But this time, the Duke would scarcely vouchsafe
A word in reply ; and in vain she felt
With twitching fingers at her belt
For the purse of sleekpine-martin pelt,
Ready to put what he gave in her pouch safe,—
Till, either to quicken his apprehension,
Or possibly with an after-intention,
She was come, she said, to pay her duty
To the new Duchess, the youthful beauty.
No sooner had she named his Lady,
Than a shine lit up the face so shady,
And its smirk returned with a novel meaning—
For it struck him, the babe just wanted weaning ;
If one gave her a taste of what life was and sorrow,
She, foolish to-day, would be wiser to-morrow ;
And who so fit a teacher of trouble
As this sordid crone bent well nigh double ?
So, glancing at her wolf-skin vesture,

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

(If such it was, for they grow so hirsute
That their own fleece serves for natural fur suit)
He was contrasting, 'twas plain from his gesture,
The life of the lady so flower-like and delicate
With the loathsome squalor of this helicat.
I, in brief, was the man the Duke beckoned
From out of the throng, and while I drew near
He told the crone, as I since have reckoned
By the way he bent and spoke into her ear
With circumspection and mystery,
The main of the Lady's history,
Her frowardness and ingratitude;
And for all the crone's submissive attitude
I could see round her mouth the loose plaits tightening.
And her brow with assenting intelligence brightening.
As tho' she engaged with hearty good will
Whatever he now might enjoin to fulfil,
And promised the lady a thorough frightening.
And so, just giving her a glimpse
Of a purse, with the air of a man who imps
The wing of the hawk that shall fetch the hernshaw.
He bade me take the gypsy mother
And set her telling some story or other
Of hill or dale, oak-wood or fernshaw,
To while away a weary hour
For the lady left alone in her bower,
Whose mind and body craved exertion
And yet shrank from all better diversion.

XIV.

Then clapping heel to his horse, the mere curvetter,
Out rode the Duke, and after his hollo
Horses and hounds swept, huntsman and servitor,
And back I turned and bade the crone follow.
And what makes me confident what's to be told you
Had all along been of this crone's devising,
Is, that, on looking round sharply, behold you,
There was a novelty quick as surprising:
For first, she had shot up a full head in stature,
And her step kept pace with mine nor faltered,

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

As if age had foregone its usurpature,
And the ignoble mien was wholly altered,
And the face looked quite of another nature,
And the change reached too, whatever the change
meant,

Her shaggy wolf-skin cloak's arrangement,
For where its tatters hung loose like sedges,
Gold coins were glittering on the edges,
Like the band-roll strung with tomans
Which proves the veil a Persian woman's:
And under her brow, like a snail's horns newly
Come out as after the rain he paces,
Two unmistakeable eye-points duly
Lived and aware looked out of their places.
So we went and found Jacynth at the entry
Of the Lady's chamber standing sentry;
I told the command and produced my companion,
And Jacynth rejoiced to admit any one,
For since last night, by the same token,
Not a single word had the Lady spoken:
So they went in both to the presence together,
While I in the balcony watched the weather.

XV.

And now, what took place at the very first of all,
I cannot tell, as I never could learn it:
Jacynth constantly wished a curse to fall
On that little head of hers and burn it,
If she knew how she came to drop so soundly
Asleep of a sudden and there continue
The whole time sleeping as profoundly
As one of the boars my father would pin you
'Twixt the eyes where the life holds garrison,
—Jacynth forgive me the comparison!
But where I begin my own narration
Is a little after I took my station
To breathe the fresh air from the balcony,
And, having in those days a falcon eye,
To follow the hunt thro' the open country,
From where the bushes thinlier crested

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

The hillocks, to a plain where's not one tree:—
When, in a moment, my ear was arrested
By—was it singing, or was it saying,
Or a strange musical instrument playing
In the chamber?—and to be certain
I pushed the lattice, pulled the curtain,
And there lay Jacynth asleep,
Yet as if a watch she tried to keep,
In a rosy sleep along the floor
With her head against the door;
While in the midst, on the seat of state,
Like a queen the Gypsy woman sate,
With head and face downbent
On the Lady's head and face intent,
For, coiled at her feet like a child at ease,
The lady sate between her knees
And o'er them the Lady's clasped hands met,
And on those hands her chin was set,
And her upturned face met the face of the crone
Wherein the eyes had grown and grown
As if she could double and quadruple
At pleasure the play of either pupil
—Very like by her hands slow fanning,
As up and down like a gor-crow's flappers
They moved to measure like bell clappers
—I said, is it blessing, is it banning,
Do they applaud you or burlesque you?
Those hands and fingers with no flesh on?
When, just as I thought to spring in to the rescue,
At once I was stopped by the Lady's expression:
For it was life her eyes were drinking
From the crone's wide pair above unwinking,
Life's pure fire received without shrinking,
Into the heart and breast whose heaving
Told you no single drop they were leaving—
Life, that filling her, past redundant
Into her very hair, back swerving
Over each shoulder, loose and abundant,
As her head thrown back showed the white throat
curving,

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

And the very tresses shared in the pleasure,
Moving to the mystic measure,
Bounding as the bosom bounded.
I stopped short, more and more confounded,
As still her cheeks burned and eyes glistened,
As she listened and she listened,—
When all at once a hand detained me,
And the selfsame contagion gained me,
And I kept time to the wondrous chime,
Making out words and prose and rhyme,
Till it seemed that the music furled
Its wings like a task fulfilled, and dropped
From under the words it first had propped,
And left them midway in the world,
And word took word as hand takes hand,
I could hear at last, and understand,
And when I held the unbroken thread,
The Gypsy said :—

“ And so at last we find my tribe,
And so I set thee in the midst,
And to one and all of them describe
What thou saidst and what thou didst,
Our long and terrible journey thro’,
And all thou art ready to say and do
In the trials that remain :
I trace them the vein and the other vein
That meet on thy brow and part again.
Making our rapid mystic mark ;
And I bid my people prove and probe
Each eye’s profound and glorious globe
Till they detect the kindred spark
In those depths so dear and dark,
Like the spots that snap, and burst, and flee,
Circling over the midnight sea.
And on that young round cheek of thine
I make them recognise the tinge,
As when of the costly scarlet wine
They drip so much as will impinge
And spread in a thinnest scale afloat

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

One thick gold drop from the olive's coat
Over a silver plate whose sheen
Still thro' the mixture shall be seen.
For, so I prove thee, to one and all,
Fit, when my people ope their breast,
To see the sign, and hear the call,
And take the vow, and stand the test
Which adds one more child to the rest—
When the breast is bare and the arms are wide,
And the world is left outside.
For there is probation to decree,
And many and long must the trials be
Thou shalt victoriously endure,
If that brow is true and those eyes are sure;
Like a jewel-finder's fierce assay
Of the prize he dug from its mountain tomb,—
Let once the vindicating ray
Leap out amid the anxious gloom,
And steel and fire have done their part
And the prize falls on its finder's heart;
So, trial after trial past,
Wilt thou fall at the very last
Breathless, half in trance
With the thrill of the great deliverance,
Into our arms for evermore;
And thou shalt know, those arms once curled
About thee, what we knew before,
How love is the only good in the world.
Henceforth be loved as heart can love,
Or brain devise, or hand approve!
Stand up, look below,
It is our life at thy feet we throw
To step with into light and joy;
Not a power of life but we'll employ
To satisfy thy nature's want;
Art thou the tree that props the plant,
Or the climbing plant that seeks the tree—
Canst thou help us, must we help thee?
If any two creatures grew into one,
They would do more than the world has done;

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

Tho' each apart were never so weak,
Yet vainly thro' the world should ye seek
For the knowledge and the might
Which in such union grew their right :
So, to approach, at least, that end,
And blend,—as much as may be, blend
Thee with us or us with thee,
As climbing-plant or propping-tree,
Shall some one deck thee, over and down,
Up and about, with blossoms and leaves ?
Fix his heart's fruit for thy garland crown,
Cling with his soul as the gourd-vine cleaves,
Die on thy boughs and disappear
While not a leaf of thine is sere ?
Or is the other fate in store,
And art thou fitted to adore,
To give thy wondrous self away,
And take a stronger nature's sway ?
I foresee and I could foretell
Thy future portion, sure and well—
But those passionate eyes speak true, speak true,
And let them say what thou shalt do !
Only, be sure thy daily life,
In its peace, or in its strife,
Never shall be unobserved ;
We pursue thy whole career,
And hope for it, or doubt, or fear,—
Lo, hast thou kept thy path or swerved ?
We are beside thee, in all thy ways,
With our blame, with our praise,
Our shame to feel, our pride to show.
Glad, sorry—but indifferent, no !
Whether it is thy lot to go,
For the good of us all, where the haters meet
In the crowded city's horrible street :
Or thou step alone thro' the morass
Where never sound yet was
Save the dry quick clap of the stork's bill,
For the air is still, and the water still.
When the blue breast of the dipping cove

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

Dives under, and all again is mute.
So at the last shall come old age,
Decrepit as befits that stage;
How else wouldst thou retire apart
With the hoarded memories of thy heart
And gather all to the very least
Of the fragments of life's earlier feast,
Let fall through eagerness to find
The crowning dainties yet behind?
Ponder on the entire past
Laid together thus at last,
When the twilight helps to fuse
The first fresh, with the faded hues,
And the outline of the whole,
As round eve's shades their framework roli,
Grandly fronts for once thy soul:
And then as, 'mid the dark, a gleam
Of yet another morning breaks,
And like the hand which ends a dream,
Death, with the might of his sunbeam
Touches the flesh and the soul awakes,
Then—"

Ay, then, indeed, something would happen!
But what? For here her voice changed like a bird's;
There grew more of the music and less of the words;
Had Jacynth only been by me to clap pen
To paper and put you down every syllable,
With those clever clerkly fingers,
All that I've forgotten as well as what lingers
In this old brain of mine that's but ill able
To give you even this poor version
Of the speech I spoil, as it were, with stammering
--More fault of those who had the hammering
Of prosody into me and syntax,
And did it, not with hobnails but tintacks!
But to return from this excursion,—
Just, do you mark, when the song was sweetest,
The peace most deep and the charm completest,
There came, shall I say, a snap—
And the charm vanished!

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

And my sense returned, so strangely banished,
And, starting as from a nap,
I knew the crone was bewitching my lady,
With Jacynth asleep; and but one spring made I,
Down from the casement, round to the portal,
Another minute and I had entered,
When the door opened, and more than mortal
Stood, with a face where to my mind centred
All beauties I ever saw or shall see,
The Duchess—I stopped as if struck by palsy.
She was so different, happy and beautiful,
I felt at once that all was best,
And that I had nothing to do, for the rest,
But wait her commands, obey and be dutiful.
Not that, in fact, there was any commanding,
—I saw the glory of her eye,
And the brow's height and the breast's expanding,
And I was hers to live or to die.
As for finding what she wanted,
You know God Almighty granted
Such little signs should serve his wild creatures
To tell one another all their desires,
So that each knows what its friend requires,
And does its bidding without teachers.
I preceded her; the crone
Followed silent and alone;
I spoke to her, but she merely jabbered
In the old style; both her eyes had slunk
Back to their pits; her stature shrunk;
In short, the soul in its body sunk
Like a blade sent home to its scabbard.
We descended, I preceding;
Crossed the court with nobody heeding;
All the world was at the chase,
The court-yard like a desert-place,
The stable emptied of its small fry;
I saddled myself the very palfrey
I remember patting while it carried her,
The day she arrived and the Duke married her.
And, do you know, though its easy deceiving

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

Oneself in such matters, I can't help believing
The lady had not forgotten it either,
And knew the poor Devil so much beneath her
Would have been only too glad for her service
To dance on hot ploughshares like a Turk dervise,
But unable to pay proper duty where owing it
Was reduced to that pitiful method of showing it:
For though the moment I began setting
His saddle on my own nag of Berold's begetting,
(Not that I meant to be obtrusive)
She stopped me, while his rug was shifting,
By a single rapid finger's lifting,
And, with a gesture kind but conclusive,
And a little shake of the head, refused me,—
I say, although she never used me,
Yet when she was mounted, the gypsy behind her,
And I ventured to remind her,
I suppose with a voice of less steadiness
Than usual, for my feelings exceeded me,
— Something to the effect that I was in readiness
Whenever God should please she needed me,—
Then, do you know, her face looked down on me
With a look that placed a crown on me,
And she felt in her bosom,—mark, her bosom—
And, as a flower-tree drops its blossom,
Dropped me—ah, had it been a purse
Of silver, my friend, or gold that's worse,
Why, you see, as soon as I found myself
So understood,—that a true heart so may gain
Such a reward,—I should have gone home again,
Kissed Jacynth, and soberly drowned myself!
It was a little plait of hair
Such as friends in a convent make
To wear, each for the other's sake,—
This, see, which at my breast I wear,
Ever did (rather to Jacynth's grudging),
And ever shall, till the Day of Judgment.
And then,—and then,—to cut short,—this is idle,
These are feelings it is not good to foster,—
I pushed the gate wide, she shook the bridle,

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

And the palfrey bounded,—and so we lost her !

XVI.

When the liquor's out, why clink the cannakin ?
I did think to describe you the panic in
The redoubtable breast of our master the mannikin,
And what was the pitch of his mother's yellowness,
How she turned as a shark to snap the spare-rib
Clean off, sailors say, from a pearl-diving Carib,
When she heard, what she called, the fight of the
feloness—

But it seems such child's play
What they said and did with the lady away !
And to dance on, when we've lost the music,
Always made me—and no doubt makes you—sick.
Nay, to my mind, the world's face looked so stern
As that sweet form disappeared thro' the postern,
She that keep it in constant good humour,
It ought to have stopped ; there seemed nothing to do
more.

But the world thought otherwise and went on,
And my head's one that its spite was spent on :
Thirty years are fled since that morning,
And with them all my head's adorning.
Nor did the old Duchess die outright,
As you expect, of suppressed spite,
The natural end of every adder
Not suffered to empty its poison-bladder :
But she and her son agreed, I take it,
That no one should touch on the story to wake it,
For the wound in the Duke's pride rankled fiery,
So they made no search and small inquiry—
And when fresh gypsies have paid us a visit, I've
Noticed the couple were never inquisitive,
But told them they're folks the Duke don't want here,
And bade them make haste and cross the frontier.
Brief, the Duchess was gone and the Duke was glad
of it

And the old one was in the young one's stead,
And took, in her place, the household's head,

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

And a blessed time the household had of it !
And were I not, as a man may say, cautious
How I trench, more than needs, on the nauseous,
I could favour you with sundry touches
Of the paint-smutches with which the Duchess
Heightened the mellowness of her cheek's yellowness
(To get on faster) until at last her
Cheek grew to be one master-plaster
Of mucus and fucus from mere use of ceruse
Till in short she grew from scalp to udder
Just the object to make you shudder !

XVII.

You're my friend—
What a thing friendship is, world without end !
How it gives the heart and soul a stir-up,
As if somebody broached you a glorious runlet,
And poured out all lovelily, sparkling, and sunlit,
Our green Moldavia, the streaky syrup,
Cotnar as old as the time of the Druids—
Friendship's as good as that monarch of fluids
To supple a dry brain, fill you its ins-and-outs,—
Gives your Life's hour-glass a shake when the thin
sand doubts
Whether to run on or stop short, and guarantees
Age is not all made of stark sloth and arrant ease !
I have seen my little Lady once more,
Jacynth, the Gypsy, Berold, and the rest of it,
For to me spoke the Duke, as I told you before ;
I always wanted to make a clean breast of it,
And now it is made—why, my heart's-blood, that went
trickle,
Trickle, but anon, in such muddy dribblets,
Is pumped up brisk now, thro' the main ventricle,
And genially floats me about the giblets !
I'll tell you what I intend to do :
I must see this fellow his sad life thro'
—He is our Duke after all,
And I, as he says, but a serf and thrall ;
My father was born here and I inherit

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

His fame, a chain he bound his son with,—
Could I pay in a lump I should prefer it,
But there's no mine to blow up and get done with,
So I must stay till the end of the chapter :
For, as to our middle-age-manners-adapter,
Be it a thing to be glad on or sorry on,
One day or other, his head in a morion,
And breast in a hauberk, his heels he'll kick up
Slain by some onslaught fierce of hiccup.
And then, when red doth the sword of our Duke rust,
And its leathern sheath lies o'ergrown with a blue
crust,

Then, I shall scrape together my earnings ;
For, you see, in the Churchyard Jacynth reposes,
And our children all went the way of the roses—
It's a long lane that knows no turnings—
One needs but little tackle to travel in,
So, just one stout cloak shall I indue,
And for a staff, what beats the javelin
With which his boars my father pinned you ?
And then, for a purpose you shall hear presently,
Taking some Cotnar, a tight plump skinfull,
I shall go journeying, who but I, pleasantly ?
Sorrow is vain and despondency sinful.
What's a man's age ? He must hurry more, that's all ;
Cram in a day, what his youth took a year to hold ;
When we mind labour, then only, we're too old—
What age had Methusalem when he begat Saul ?
And at last, as its haven some buffeted ship sees,
(Come all the way from the north-parts with sperm
oil)

I shall get safely out of the turmoil
And arrive one day at the land of the gypsies
And find my lady, or hear the last news of her
From some old thief and son of Lucifer,
His forehead chapletted green with wreathy hop,
Sunburned all over like an Æthiop :
And when my Cotnar begins to operate
And the tongue of the rogue to run at a proper rate,
And our wine-skin, tight once, shows each flaccid dent,

EARTH'S IMMORTALITIES

I shall drop in with—as if by accident—
“You never knew then, how it all ended,
“What fortunes good or bad attended
“The little lady your Queen befriended?”
—And when that's told me, what's remaining?
This world's too hard for my explaining—
The same wise judge of matters equine
Who still preferred some slim four-year-old
To the big-boned stock of mighty Berold,
And for strong Cotnar drank French weak wine,
He also must be such a lady's scorner!
Smooth Jacob still robs homely Esau,
Now up, now down, the world's one see-saw!
—So, I shall find out some snug corner
Under a hedge, like Orson the wood-knight,
Turn myself round and bid the world good night;
And sleep a sound sleep till the trumpet's blowing
Wakes me (unless priests cheat us laymen)
To a world where's to be no further throwing
Pearls before swine that can't value them. Amen!

EARTH'S IMMORTALITIES

FAME

SEE, as the prettiest graves will do in time,
Our poet's wants the freshness of its prime;
Spite of the sexton's browsing horse, the sods
Have struggled thro' its binding osier-rods;
Headstone and half-sunk footstone lean awry,
Wanting the brick-work promised by and by;
How the minute grey lichens, plate o'er plate,
Have softened down the crisp-cut name and date!

LOVE

So, the year's done with!
(*Love me for ever!*)
All March begun with,

THE BOY AND THE ANGEL

April's endeavour;
May-wreaths that bound me
June needs must sever!
Now snows fall round me,
Quenching June's fever—
(*Love me for ever!*)

SONG

I.

NAY but you, who do not love her,
Is she not pure gold, my mistress?
Holds earth aught—speak truth—above her?
Aught like this tress, see, and this tress,
And this last fairest tress of all,
So fair, see, ere I let it fall!

II.

Because, you spend your lives in praising;
To praise, you search the wide world over;
So, why not witness, calmly gazing,
If earth holds aught—speak truth—above her?
Above this tress, and this I touch
But cannot praise, I love so much!

THE BOY AND THE ANGEL

MORNING, evening, noon, and night,
"Praise God," sang Theocrite.

Then to his poor trade he turned,
By which the daily meal was earned.

Hard he laboured, long and well;
O'er his work the boy's curls fell:

But ever, at each period,
He stopped and sang, "Praise God."

THE BOY AND THE ANGEL

Then back again his curls he threw,
And cheerful turned to work anew.

Said Blaise, the listening monk, "Well done;
"I doubt not thou art heard, my son :

"As well as if thy voice to-day
"Were praising God, the Pope's great way.

"This Easter Day, the Pope at Rome
"Praises God from Peter's dome."

Said Theocrite, "Would God that I
"Might praise Him, that great way, and die!"

Night passed, day shone,
And Theocrite was gone.

With God a day endures alway,
A thousand years are but a day.

God said in Heaven, "Nor day nor night
"Now brings the voice of my delight."

Then Gabriel, like a rainbow's birth,
Spread his wings and sank to earth;

Entered in flesh, the empty cell,
Lived there, and played the craftsman well :

And morning, evening, noon, and night,
Praised God in place of Theocrite.

And from a boy, to youth he grew :
The man put off the stripling's hue :

The man matured and fell away
Into the season of decay :

And ever o'er the trade he bent,
And ever lived on earth content.

THE BOY AND THE ANGEL

(He did God's will ; to him, all one
If on the earth or in the sun.)

God said, "A praise is in mine ear ;
"There is no doubt in it, no fear :

"So sing old worlds, and so
"New worlds that from my footstool go.

"Clearer loves sound other ways :
"I miss my little human praise."

Then forth sprang Gabriel's wings, off fell
The flesh disguise, remained the cell.

'Twas Easter Day : he flew to Rome,
And paused above Saint Peter's dome.

In the tiring-room close by
The great outer gallery,

With his holy vestments dight,
Stood the new Pope, Theocrite :

And all his past career
Came back upon him clear,

Since when, a boy, he plied his trade,
Till on his life the sickness weighed ;

And in his cell, when death drew near,
An angel in a dream brought cheer :

And rising from the sickness drear
He grew a priest, and now stood here.

To the East with praise he turned,
And on his sight the angel burned.

"I bore thee from thy craftsman's cell,
"And set thee here ; I did not well.

MEETING AT NIGHT

"Vainly I left my angel's-sphere,
"Vain was thy dream of many a year.

"Thy voice's praise seemed weak; it dropped—
"Creation's chorus stopped!

"Go back and praise again
"The early way—while I remain.

"With that weak voice of our disdain,
"Take up Creation's pausing strain.

"Back to the cell and poor employ:
"Become the craftsman and the boy!"

Theocrite grew old at home;
A new Pope dwelt in Peter's Dome.

One vanished as the other died:
They sought God side by side.

MEETING AT NIGHT

I.

THE grey sea and the long black land;
And the yellow half-moon large and low;
And the startled little waves that leap
In fiery ringlets from their sleep,
As I gain the cove with pushing prow,
And quench its speed in the slushy sand.

II.

Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach;
Three fields to cross till a farm appears;
A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch
And blue spurt of a lighted match,
And a voice less loud, thro' its joys and fears,
Than the two hearts beating each to each!

SAUL

PARTING AT MORNING

ROUND the cape of a sudden came the sea,
And the sun looked over the mountain's rim—
And straight was a path of gold for him,
And the need of a world of men for me.

SAUL

SAID Abner, "At last thou art come!

"Ere I tell, ere thou speak,—

"Kiss my cheek, wish me well!" Then I wished it,
And did kiss his cheek:

And he, "Since the King, oh my friend,

"For thy countenance sent,
Nor drunken nor eaten have we;

Nor, until from his tent
Thou return with the joyful assurance

The king liveth yet,
Shall our lip with the honey be brightened,
—The water, be wet.

"For out of the black mid-tent's silence,
A space of three days,

No sound hath escaped to thy servants,
Of prayer nor of praise,

To betoken that Saul and the Spirit
Have ended their strife,

And that faint in his triumph the monarch
Sinks back upon life.

"Yet now my heart leaps, O beloved!

God's child, with his dew
On thy gracious gold hair, and those lilies
Still living and blue

As thou brak'st them to twine round thy harp-
strings,

SAUL

As if no wild heat
Were raging to torture the desert!"
Then I, as was meet,
Knelt down to the God of my fathers,
And rose on my feet,
And ran o'er the sand burnt to powder.
The tent was unlooped;
I pulled up the spear that obstructed,
And under I stooped;
Hands and knees o'er the slippery grass-patch—
All withered and gone—
That leads to the second enclosure,
I groped my way on,
Till I felt where the foldskirts fly open;
Then once more I prayed,
And opened the foldskirts and entered,
And was not afraid;
And spoke, "Here is David, thy servant!"
And no voice replied;
And first I saw nought but the blackness;
But soon I descried
A something more black than the blackness
—The vast, the upright
Main-prop which sustains the pavilion,—
And slow into sight
Grew a figure, gigantic, against it,
And blackest of all;—
Then a sunbeam, that burst thro' the tent-roof,
Showed Saul.
He stood as erect as that tent-prop;
Both arms stretched out wide
On the great cross-support in the centre
That goes to each side:
So he bent not a muscle, but hung there
As, caught in his pangs
And waiting his change, the king-serpent
All heavily hangs,
Far away from his kind, in the pine,
Till deliverance come
With the Spring-time,—so agonized Saul,

SAUL

Drear and stark, blind and dumb.

Then I tuned my harp,—took off the lilies
We twine round its chords
Lest they snap 'neath the stress of the noontide
—Those sunbeams like swords!
And I first played the tune all our sheep know,
As, one after one,
So docile they come to the pen-door
Till folding be done;
—They are white and untorn by the bushes,
For lo, they have fed
Where the long grasses stifle the water
Within the stream's bed:
How one after one seeks its lodging,
As star follows star
Into eve and the blue far above us,
—So blue and so far!
Then the tune for which quails on the cornland
Will leave each his mate
To follow the player; then, what makes
The crickets elate
Till for boldness they fight one another:
And then, what has weight
To set the quick jerboa a-musing
Outside his sand house
—There are none such as he for a wonder—
Half bird and half mouse!
—God made all the creatures and gave them
Our love and our fear,
To show, we and they are his children,
One family here.

Then I played the help-tune of our reapers,
Their wine-song, when hand
Grasps hand, eye lights eye in good friendship,
And great hearts expand,
And grow one in the sense of this world's life;
And then, the low song

SAUL

When the dead man is praised on his journey—

“Bear, bear him along

“With his few faults shut up like dead flowrets;

“Are balm-seeds not here

“To console us? The land is left none such

“As he on the bier—

“Oh, would we might keep thee, my brother!”

And then, the glad chaunt

Of the marriage,—first go the young maidens,

Next, she whom we vaunt

As the beauty, the pride of our dwelling:

And then, the great march

When man runs to man to assist him,

And buttress an arch

Nought can break . . . who shall harm them, our
friends?

Then, the chorus intoned

As the Levites go up to the altar

In glory enthroned—

But I stopped here—for here, in the darkness,

Saul groaned.

And I paused, held my breath in such silence!

And listened apart;

And the tent shook, for mighty Saul shuddered,—

And sparkles gan dart

From the jewels that woke in his turban

—At once with a start

All its lordly male-sapphires, and rubies

Courageous at heart;

So the head—but the body still moved not,

Still hung there erect.

And I bent once again to my playing,

Pursued it unchecked,

As I sang, “Oh, our manhood’s prime vigour!

—No spirit feels waste,

No muscle is stopped in its playing,

No sinew unbraced;—

And the wild joys of living! The leaping

From rock up to rock—

SAUL

The rending their boughs from the palm-trees,—
The cool silver shock
Of a plunge in the pool's living water—
The haunt of the bear,
And the sultriness showing the lion
Is couched in his lair:
And the meal—the rich dates—yellowed over
With gold dust divine,
And the locust's-flesh steeped in the pitcher,
The full draught of wine,
And the sleep in the dried river channel
Where tall rushes tell
The water was wont to go warbling
So softly and well,—
How good is man's life here, mere living!
How fit to employ
The heart and the soul and the senses
For ever in joy!
Hast thou loved the white locks of thy father
Whose sword thou didst guard
When he trusted thee forth to the wolf hunt
For glorious reward?
Didst thou see the thin hands of thy mother
Held up, as men sung
The song of the nearly-departed,
And heard her faint tongue
Joining in while it could to the witness
“Let one more attest,
“I have lived, seen God's hand thro' that life-time
“And all was for best . . .”
Then they sung thro' their tears, in strong triumph,
Not much,—but the rest!
And thy brothers—the help and the contest,
The working whence grew
Such result, as from seething grape-bundles
The spirit so true:
And the friends of thy boyhood—that boyhood
With wonder and hope,
Present promise, and wealth in the future,—
The eye's eagle scope,—

TIME'S REVENGES

Till lo, thou art grown to a monarch,
A people is thine!
Oh all gifts the world offers singly,
On one head combine,
On one head the joy and the pride,
Even rage like the throe
That opes the rock, helps its glad labour,
And let's the gold go—
And ambition that sees a sun lead it—
Oh, all of these—all
Combine to unite in one creature
—Saul!

END OF PART THE FIRST.

TIME'S REVENGES

I'VE a Friend, over the sea;
I like him, but he loves me;
It all grew out of the books I write;
They find such favour in his sight
That he slaughters you with savage looks
Because you don't admire my books:
He does himself though,—and if some vein
Were to snap to-night in this heavy brain,
To-morrow month, if I lived to try,
Round should I just turn quietly,
Or out of the bedclothes stretch my hand
Till I found him, come from his foreign land
To be my nurse in this poor place,
And make me broth, and wash my face,
And light my fire, and, all the while,
Bear with his old good-humoured smile
That I told him "Better have kept away
"Than come and kill me, night and day,
"With worse than fever's throbs and shoots,
"At the creaking of his clumsy boots."
I am as sure that this he would do,

TIME'S REVENGES

As that Saint Paul's is striking Two :
And I think I had rather . . . woe is me !
—Yes, rather see him than not see,
If lifting a hand would seat him there
Before me in the empty chair
To-night, when my head aches indeed,
And I can neither think, nor read,
And these blue fingers will not hold
The pen ; this garret's freezing cold !

And I've a Lady—There he wakes,
The laughing fiend and prince of snakes
Within me, at her name, to pray
Fate send some creature in the way
Of my love for her, to be down-torn
Upthrust and onward borne
So I might prove myself that sea
Of passion which I needs must be !
Call my thoughts false and my fancies quaint,
And my style infirm, and its figures faint,
All the critics say, and more blame yet,
And not one angry word you get !
But, please you, wonder I would put
My cheek beneath that Lady's foot
Rather than trample under mine
The laurels of the Florentine,
And you shall see how the Devil spends
A fire God gave for other ends !
I tell you, I stride up and down
This garret, crowned with love's best crown,
And feasted with love's perfect feast,
To think I kill for her, at least,
Body and soul and peace and fame,
Alike youth's end and manhood's aim,
—So is my spirit, as flesh with sin,
Filled full, eaten out and in
With the face of her, the eyes of her,
The lips and little chin, the stir
Of shadow round her mouth ; and she
—I'll tell you,—calmly would decree

THE GLOVE

That I should roast at a slow fire,
If that would compass her desire
And make her one whom they invite
To the famous ball to-morrow night.

There may be Heaven ; there must be Hell ;
Meantime, there is our Earth here—well !

THE GLOVE

(PETER RONSARD *loquitur.*)

“HEIGHO,” yawned one day King Francis,
“Distance all value enhances !
“When a man’s busy, why, leisure
“Strikes him as wonderful pleasure,—
“‘Faith, and at leisure once is he ?
“Straightway he wants to be busy.
“Here we’ve got peace ; and aghast I’m
“Caught thinking war the true pastime !
“Is there a reason in metre ?
“Give us your speech, master Peter !”
I who, if mortal dare say so,
Ne’er am at loss with my Naso,
“Sire,” I replied, “joys prove cloudlets :
“Men are the merest Ixions”—
Here the King whistled aloud, “Let’s
“ . . Heigho . . go look at our lions ! ”
Such are the sorrowful chances
If you talk fine to King Francis.

And so, to the courtyard proceeding,
Our company, Francis was leading,
Increased by new followers tenfold
Before he arrived at the penfold ;
Lords, ladies, like clouds which bedizen
At sunset the western horizon.
And Sir De Lorge pressed ’mid the foremost

THE GLOVE

With the dame he professed to adore **most**—
Oh, what a face! One by fits eyed
Her, and the horrible pitside;
For the penfold surrounded a hollow
Which led where the eye scarce dared follow,
And shelved to the chamber secluded
Where Bluebeard, the great lion, brooded.
The king hailed his keeper, an Arab
As glossy and black as a scarab,
And bade him make sport and at once stir
Up and out of his den the old monster.
They opened a hole in the wirework
Across it, and dropped there a firework,
And fled; one's heart's beating redoubled;
A pause, while the pit's mouth was troubled,
The blackness and silence so utter,
By the firework's slow sparkling and sputter;
Then earth in a sudden contortion
Gave out to our gaze her abortion!
Such a brute! Were I friend Clement Marot
(Who's experience of nature's but narrow,
And whose faculties move in no small mist
When he versifies David the Psalmist)
I should study that brute to describe you
Ilum Juda Leonem de Tribu!
One's whole blood grew curdling and creepy
To see the black mane, vast and heapy,
The tail in the air stiff and straining,
The wide eyes, nor waxing nor waning,
As over the barrier which bounded
His platform, and us who surrounded
The barrier, they reached and they rested
On the space that might stand him in best stead:
For who knew, he thought, what the amazement,
The eruption of clatter and blaze meant,
And if, in this minute of wonder,
No outlet, 'mid lightning and thunder,
Lay broad, and, his shackles all shivered,
The lion at last was delivered?
Ay, that was the open sky o'erhead!

THE GLOVE

And you saw by the flash on his forehead,
By the hope in those eyes wide and steady,
He was leagues in the desert already,
Driving the flocks up the mountain,
Or catlike couched hard by the fountain
To waylay the date-gathering negress:
So guarded be entrance or egress.
"How he stands!" quoth the King: "we may well
swear,
"No novice, we've won our spurs elsewhere,
"And so can afford the confession,
"We exercise wholesome discretion
"In keeping aloof from his threshold;
"Once hold you, those jaws want no fresh hold,
"Their first would too pleasantly purloin
"The visitor's brisket or sirloin:
"But who's he would prove so fool-hardy?
"Not the best man of Marignan, pardie!"

The sentence no sooner was uttered,
Than over the rails a glove fluttered,
Fell close to the lion, and rested:
The dame 'twas, who flung it and jested
With life so, De Lorge had been wooing
For months past; he sate there pursuing
His suit, weighing out with nonchalance
Fine speeches like gold from a balance.

Sound the trumpet, no true knight's a tarrier!
De Lorge made one leap at the barrier,
Walked straight to the glove,—while the lion
Ne'er moved, kept his far-reaching eye on
The palm-tree-edged desert-spring's sapphire,
And the musky oiled skin of the Kaffir,—
Picked it up, and as calmly retreated,
Leaped back where the lady was seated,
And full in the face of its owner
Flung the glove—

"Your heart's queen, you dethrone her?"

THE GLOVE

"So should I"—cried the King—"twas mere vanity,
"Not love, set that task to humanity!"
Lords and ladies alike turned with loathing
From such a proved wolf in sheep's clothing.

Not so, I; for I caught an expression
In her brow's undisturbed self-possession
Amid the Court's scoffing and merriment,—
As if from no pleasing experiment
She rose, yet of pain not much heedful
So long as the process was needful—
As if she had tried in a crucible,
To what "speeches like gold" were reducible,
And, finding the finest prove copper,
Felt the smoke in her face was but proper;
To know what she had *not* to trust to,
Was worth all the ashes, and dust too.
She went out 'mid hooting and laughter;
Clement Marot stayed; I followed after,
And asked, as a grace, what it all meant—
If she wished not the rash deed's recalment?
"For I"—so I spoke—"am a Poet:
"Human nature,—behoves that I know it!"

She told me, "Too long had I heard
"Of the deed proved alone by the word:
"For my love,—what De Lorge would not dare!
"With my scorn—what De Lorge could compare!
"And the endless descriptions of death
"He would brave when my lip formed a breath,
"I must reckon as braved, or, of course,
"Doubt his word—and moreover, perforce,
"For such gifts as no lady could spurn,
"Must offer my love in return.
"When I looked on your lion, it brought
"All the dangers at once to my thought,
"Encountered by all sorts of men,
"Before he was lodged in his den,—
"From the poor slave whose club or bare hands
"Dug the trap, set the snare on the sands,

THE GLOVE

"With no King and no Court to applaud,
"By no shame, should he shrink, overawed,
"Yet to capture the creature made shift,
"That his rude boys might laugh at the gift,
"To the page who last leaped o'er the fence
"Of the pit, on no greater pretence
"Than to get back the bonnet he dropped,
"Lest his pay for a week should be stopped—
"So, wiser I judged it to make
"One trial what 'death for my sake'
"Really meant, while the power was yet mine,
"Than to wait until time should define
"Such a phase not so simply as I,
"Who took it to mean just 'to die.'
"The blow a glove gives is but weak—
"Does the mark yet discolour my cheek?
"But when the heart suffers a blow,
"Will the pain pass so soon, do you know?"

I looked, as away she was sweeping,
And saw a youth eagerly keeping
As close as he dared to the doorway:
No doubt that a noble should more weigh
His life than befits a plebeian;
And yet, had our brute been Nemean—
(I judge by a certain calm fervor
The youth stepped with, forward to serve her)
—He'd have scarce thought you did him the worst
turn

If you whispered "Friend, what you'd get, first
earn!"

And when, shortly after, she carried
Her shame from the Court, and they married,
To that marriage some happiness, maugre
The voice of the Court, I dared augur.

For De Lorge, he made women with men vie,
Those in wonder and praise, these in envy;
And in short stood so plain a head taller
That he wooed and won . . . How do you call her?

THE GLOVE

The beauty, that rose in the sequel
To the King's love, who loved her a week well ;
And 'twas noticed he never would honour
De Lorge (who looked daggers upon her)
With the easy commission of stretching
His legs in the service, and fetching
His wife, from her chamber, those straying
Sad gloves she was always mislaying,
While the King took the closet to chat in,—
But of course this adventure came pat in ;
And never the King told the story,
How bringing a glove brought such glory,
But the wife smiled—"His nerves are grown
firmer—
"Mine he brings now and utters no murmur !"

Venienti occurrere morbo!

With which moral I drop my theorbo.

LURIA

A TRAGEDY

BY ANTHONY M. LURIA

NEW YORK: 1911

I DEDICATE

THIS LAST ATTEMPT FOR THE PRESENT AT DRAMATIC
POETRY

TO A GREAT DRAMATIC POET ;

“ WISHING WHAT I WRITE MAY BE READ BY HIS LIGHT : ”

—IF A PHRASE ORIGINALLY ADDRESSED, BY NOT THE
LEAST WORTHY OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES,

TO SHAKESPEARE,

MAY BE APPLIED HERE, BY ONE WHOSE SOLE PRIVI-
LEGE IS IN A GRATEFUL ADMIRATION,

TO WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR.

LURIA

PERSONS

LURIA, a Moor, Commander of the Florentine Forces.

HUSAIN, a Moor, his friend.

PUCCIO, the old Florentine Commander, now LURIA'S Chief Officer.

BRACCIO, Commissary of the Republic of Florence.

JACOPO (LAPO), his Secretary.

TIBURZIO, Commander of the Pisans.

DOMIZIA, a noble Florentine Lady.

TIME, 14—.

SCENE.—LURIA'S *Camp between Florence and Pisa.*

ACT I

MORNING

BRACCIO, *as dictating to his Secretary*; PUCCIO
standing by.

Brac. [to Puc.] Then, you join battle in an hour?

Puc. Not I;

Luria, the Captain.

Brac. [to the Sec.] "In an hour, the battle."

[To Puc.] Sir, let your eye run o'er this loose digest
And see if very much of your report
Have slipped away through my civilian phrase.
Does this instruct the Signory aright
How army stands with army?

LURIA

Puc. [*taking the paper.*] All seems here :
—That Luria, seizing with our City's force
The several points of vantage, hill and plain,
Shuts Pisa safe from help on every side,
And baffling the Lucchese arrived too late,
Must, in the battle he delivers now,
Beat her best troops and first of chiefs.

Brac.

So sure?

Tiburzio's a consummate captain too!

Puc. Luria holds Pisa's fortune in his hand.

Brac. [*to the Sec.*] "The Signory hold Pisa in their hand!"

Your own proved soldiership's our warrant, sir:
So, while my secretary ends his task,
Have out two horsemen, by the open roads,
To post with it to Florence!

Puc. [*returning the paper.*] All seems here;
Unless . . . Ser Braccio, 'tis my last report!
Since Pisa's outbreak, and my overthrow,
And Luria's hastening at the city's call
To save her, as he only could, no doubt;
Till now that she is saved or sure to be,—
Whatever you tell Florence, I tell you:
Each day's note you, her Commissary, make
Of Luria's movements, I myself supply.
No youngster am I longer, to my cost;
Therefore while Florence gloried in her choice
And vaunted Luria, whom but Luria, still,
As if zeal, courage, prudence, conduct, faith,
Had never met in any man before,
I saw no pressing need to swell the cry.
But now, this last report and I have done—
So, ere to-night comes with its roar of praise,
'Twere not amiss if some one old i' the trade
Subscribed with, "True, for once rash counsel's best;
"This Moor of the bad faith and doubtful race,
"This boy to whose untried sagacity,
"Raw valour, Florence trusts without reserve
"The charge to save her, justifies her choice;
"In no point has this stranger failed his friends;

LURIA

"Now praise!" I say this, and it is not here.

Brac. [to the Sec]. Write, "Puccio, superseded in the charge

"By Luria, bears full witness to his worth,

"And no reward our Signory can give

"Their champion but he'll back it cheerfully."

Aught more? Five minutes hence, both messengers!

[PUCCIO goes.]

Brac. [after a pause, and while he slowly tears the paper into shreds.]

I think . . . pray God, I hold in fit contempt

This warfare's noble art and ordering,

And,—once the brace of prizers fairly matched,

Poleaxe with poleaxe, knife with knife as good,—

Spit properly at what men term their skill . . .

Yet here I think our fighter has the odds;

With Pisa's strength diminished thus and thus,

Such points of vantage in our hands and such,

With Lucca off the stage, too,—all's assured:

Luria must win this battle. Write the Court.

That Luria's trial end and sentence pass!

Sec. Patron,—

Brac. Aye, Lapo?

Sec. If you trip, I fall;

'Tis in self-interest I speak—

Brac. Nay, nay,

You overshoot the mark, my Lapo! Nay!

When did I say pure love's impossible?

I make you daily write those red cheeks thin,

Load your young brow with what concerns it least,

And, when we visit Florence, let you pace

The Piazza by my side as if we talked,

Where all your old acquaintances may see:

You'd die for me, I should not be surprised!

Now then!

Sec. Sir, look about and love yourself!

Step after step the Signory and you

Tread gay till this tremendous point's to pass;

Which, pass not, pass not, ere you ask yourself,

Bears the brain steadily such draughts of fire,

LURIA

Or too delicious may not prove the pride
Of this long secret Trial you dared plan,
Dare execute, you solitary here,
With the grey-headed toothless fools at home,
Who think themselves your lords, they are such
slaves?

If they pronounce this sentence as you bid,
Declare the treason, claim its penalty,—
And sudden out of all the blaze of life,
On the best minute of his brightest day,
From that adoring army at his back,
Thro' Florence' joyous crowds before his face,
Into the dark you beckon Luria . . .

Brac.

Then—

Why, Lapo, when the fighting-people vaunt,
We of the other craft and mystery,
May we not smile demure, the danger past?

Sec. Sir, no, no, no,—the danger, and your spirit
At watch and ward? Where's danger on your part,
With that thin flitting instantaneous steel,
'Gainst the blind bull-front of a brute-force world?
If Luria, that's to perish sure as fate,
Should have been really guiltless after all?

Brac. Ah, you have thought that?

Sec.

Here I sit, your scribe,

And in and out goes Luria, days and nights;
This Puccio comes; the Moor his other friend,
Husain; they talk—all that's feigned easily;
He speaks (I would not listen if I could),
Reads, orders, counsels;—but he rests sometimes,—
I see him stand and eat, sleep stretched an hour
On the lynx-skins, yonder; hold his bared black arms
Into the sun from the tent-opening; laugh
When his horse drops the forage from his teeth
And neighs to hear him hum his Moorish songs,
That man believes in Florence, as the Saint
Tied to the wheel believes in God!

Brac.

How strange—

You too have thought that!

Sec.

Do but you think too,

LURIA

And all is saved! I only have to write,
The man seemed false awhile, proves true at last;
Bury it . . . so I write to the Signory . . .
Bury this Trial in your breasts for ever,
Blot it from things or done or dreamed about,
So Luria shall receive his meed to-day
With no suspicion what reverse was near,—
As if no meteoric finger hushed
The doom-word just on the destroyer's lip.
Motioned him off, and let life's sun fall straight.
Brac. [*looks to the wall of the tent.*] Did he draw
that?

Sec. With charcoal, when the watch
Made the report at midnight; Lady Domizia
Spoke of the unfinished Duomo, you remember;
That is his fancy how a Moorish front
Might join to, and complete, the body,—a sketch,—
And again where the cloak hangs, yonder in the
shadow.

Brac. He loves that woman.

Sec. She is sent the spy
Of Florence,—spies on you as you on him:
Florence, if only for Domizia's sake,
Is surely safe. What shall I write?

Brac. I see—
A Moorish front, nor of such ill design!
Lapo, there's one thing plain and positive;
Man seeks his own good at the whole world's cost.
What? If to lead our troops, stand forth our chiefs,
And hold our fate, and see us at their beck,
Yet render up the charge when peace returned,
Have ever proved too much for Florentines,
Even for the best and bravest of ourselves—
If in the struggle when the soldier's sword
Should sink its point before the statist's pen,
And the calm head replace the violent hand,
Virtue on virtue still have fallen away
Before ambition with unvarying fate,
Till Florence' self at last in bitterness
Be forced to own such falls the natural end,

LURIA

And, sparing further to expose her sons
To a vain strife and profitless disgrace,
Declare "The Foreigner, one not my child,
"Shall henceforth lead my troops, reach height by
height
"The glory, then descend into the shame;
"So shall rebellion be less guilt in him,
"And punishment the easier task for me"
—If on the best of us this brand she set,
Can I suppose an utter alien here,
This Luria, our inevitable foe,
Confessed a mercenary and a Moor,
Born free from any ties that bind the rest
Of common faith in Heaven or hope on Earth,
No Past with us, no Future,—such a Spirit
Shall hold the path from which our staunchest
broke,
Stand firm where every famed precursor fell?
My Lapo, I will frankly say, these proofs
So duly noted of the man's intent,
Are for the doting fools at home, not me;
The charges here, they may be true or false,
—What is set down? Errors and oversights,
This dallying interchange of courtesies
With Pisa's General,—all that, hour by hour,
Puccio's pale discontent has furnished us,
Of petulant speeches, inconsiderate acts,
Now overhazard, overcaution now;
Even that he loves this Lady who believes
She outwits Florence, and whom Florence posted
By my procurement here, to spy on me,
Lest I one minute lose her from my sight—
She who remembering her whole House's fall,
That nest of traitors strangled in the birth,
Now labours to make Luria . . . poor device
As plain . . . the instrument of her revenge!
—That she is ever at his ear to prompt
Inordinate conceptions of his worth,
Exorbitant belief in its reward,
And after, when sure disappointment follows,

LURIA

Proportionable rage at such a wrong—
Why, all these reasons, while I urge them most,
Weigh with me less than least; as nothing weigh!
Upon that broad Man's heart of his, I go!
On what I know must be, yet while I live
Will never be, because I live and know!
Brute-force shall not rule Florence! Intellect
May rule her, bad or good as chance supplies,—
But Intellect it shall be, pure if bad,
And Intellect's tradition so kept up
Till the good comes—'twas Intellect that ruled,
Not Brute-force bringing from the battle-field
The attributes of wisdom, foresight's graces
We lent it there to lure its grossness on;
All which it took for earnest and kept safe
To show against us in our market-place,
Just as the plumes and tags and swordsman's gear
(Fetched from the camp where at their foolish best
When all was done the frightened nobody)
Perk in our faces in the street, forsooth,
With our own warrant and allowance. No!
The whole procedure's overcharged,—its end
In too strict keeping with the bad first step.
To conquer Pisa was sheer inspiration?
Well then, to perish for a single fault,
Let that be simple justice!—There, my Lapo!
A Moorish front ill suits our Duomo's body—
Blot it out—and bid Luria's sentence come!

[LURIA *who, with DOMIZIA, has entered unobserved
at the close of the last phrase, now advancing.*

And Luria, Luria, what of Luria now?

Brac. Ah, you so close, Sir? Lady Domizia too?
I said it needs must be a busy moment
For one like you—that you were now i' the thick
Of your duties, doubtless, while we idlers sate . . .

Lur. No—in that paper,—it was in that paper
What you were saying!

Brac. Oh—my day's dispatch!
I censure you to Florence: will you see?

Lur. See your dispatch, your last, for the first time?

LURIA

Well, if I should, now? For in truth, Domizia,
He would be forced to set about another,
In his sly cool way, the true Florentine,
To mention that important circumstance;
So while he wrote I should gain time, such time!
Do not send this!

Brac. And wherefore ?

Lur. These Lucchese

Are not arrived—they never will arrive!
And I must fight to-day, arrived or not;
And I shall beat Tiburzio, that is sure:
And then will be arriving my Lucchese,
But slowly, oh so slowly, just in time
To look upon my battle from the hills,
Like a late moon, of use to nobody!
And I must break my battle up, send forth,
Surround on this side, hold in check on that—
Then comes to-morrow, we negotiate,
You make me send for fresh instructions home,
—Incompleteness, incompleteness!

Brac. Ah, we scribes!

Why, I had registered that very point,
The non-appearance of our foes' ally,
As a most happy fortune ; both at once
Were formidable—singly faced, each falls.

Lur. So no great battle for my Florentines!
No crowning deed, decisive and complete,
For all of them, the simple as the wise,
Old, young, alike, that do not understand
Our wearisome pedantic art of war,
By which we prove retreat may be success,
Delay—best speed,—half loss, at times,—whole gain:
They want results—as if it were their fault!
And you, with warmest wish to be my friend,
Will not be able now to simply say
“Your servant has performed his task—enough!
“You ordered, he has executed: good!
“Now walk the streets in holiday attire,
“Congratulate your friends, till noon strikes fierce,
“Then form bright groups beneath the Duomo’s shade!”

LURIA

No ! you will have to argue and explain,
Persuade them all is not so ill in the end,
Tease, tire them out ! Arrive, arrive, Lucchese !

Dom. Well, you will triumph for the Past enough,
Whatever be the Present's chance—no service
Falls to the ground with Florence ; she awaits
Her saviour, will receive him fittingly.

Lur. Ah, Braccio, you know Florence . . . will she,
think you,

Receive one . . . what means "fittingly receive?"
—Receive compatriots, doubtless—I am none :
And yet Domizia promises so much !

Brac. Kind women still give men a woman's prize.
I know not o'er which gate most boughs will arch,
Nor if the Square will wave red flags or blue—
I should have judged, the fullest of rewards
Our State gave Luria, when she made him chief
Of her whole force, in her best Captain's place.

Lur. That my reward ? Florence on my account
Relieved Ser Puccio ?—mark you, my reward !
And Puccio's having all the fight's true joy—
Goes here and there, directs, may fight himself,
While I must order, stand aloof, o'ersee !
That was my calling—there was my true place !
I should have felt, in some one over me,
Florence impersonate, my visible Head,
As I am over Puccio,—taking life
Directly from her eye !—They give me you !
But do you cross me, set me half to work ?
I enjoy nothing—but I will, for once !
Decide, shall we join battle ? may I wait ?

Brac. Let us compound the matter ; wait till noon ;
Then, no arrival,—

Lur. Ah, noon comes too fast !
I wonder, do you guess why I delay
Involuntarily the final blow
As long as possible ? Peace follows it !
Florence at peace, and the calm studious heads
Come out again, the penetrating eyes ;
As if a spell broke, all's resumed, each art

LURIA

You boast, more vivid that it slept awhile!
Gainst the glad heaven, o'er the white palace-front
The interrupted scaffold climbs anew;
The walls are peopled by the Painter's brush;
The Statue to its niche ascends to dwell;
The Present's noise and trouble have retired
And left the eternal Past to rule once more.—
You speak its speech and read its records plain,
Greece lives with you, each Roman breathes your
friend,

—But Luria—where will then be Luria's place?

Dom. Highest in honour, for that Past's own sake,
Of which his actions, sealing up the sum
By saving all that went before from wreck,
Will range as part, with which be worshipped too.

Lur. Then I may walk and watch you in your
streets

Leading the life my rough life helps no more,
So different, so new, so beautiful—
Nor fear that you will tire to see parade
The club that slew the lion, now that crooks
And shepherd-pipes come into use again?
For very lone and silent seems my East
In its drear vastness—still it spreads, and still
No Braccios, no Domizias anywhere—
Not ever more!—Well, well, to-day is ours!

Dom. [to BRAC.] Should he not have been one of us?

Lur. Oh, no!

Not one of you, and so escape the thrill
Of coming into you, and changing thus,—
Feeling a soul grow on me that restricts
The boundless unrest of the savage heart!
The sea heaves up, hangs loaded o'er the land,
Breaks there and buries its tumultuous strength;
Horror, and silence, and a pause awhile;
Lo, inland glides the gulf-stream, miles away,
In rapture of assent, subdued and still,
'Neath those strange banks, those unimagined skies!
Well, 'tis not sure the quiet lasts for ever!
Your placid heads still find our hands new work;

LURIA

Some minutes' chance--there comes the need of mine--
And, all resolved on, I too hear at last.
Oh, you must find some use for me, Ser Braccio!
You hold my strength; 'twere best dispose of it!
What you created, see that you find food for--
I shall be dangerous else!

Brac. How dangerous, Sir?

Lur. Oh, there are many ways, Domizia warns me,
And one with half the power that I possess,
Grows very formidable! Do you doubt?
Why, first, who holds the army . . .

Dom. While we talk
Morn wears, we keep you from your proper place
In the field!--

Lur. Nay, to the field I move no more!
My part is done, and Puccio's may begin!
I cannot trench upon his province longer
With any face.--You think yourselves so safe?
Why see--in concert with Tiburzio, now--
One could . . .

Dom. A trumpet!

Lur. My Lucchese at last!
Arrived, as sure as Florence stands! your leave!

[*Springs out.*]

Dom. How plainly is true greatness characterized
By such unconsciousness as Luria's here,
And sharing least the secret of itself!
Be it with head that schemes or hand that acts,
Such save the world which none but they could save,
Yet think whate'er they did, that world could do.

Brac. Yes: and how worthy note, that those same
great ones

In hand or head, with such unconsciousness
And all its due entailed humility,
Should never shrink, so far as I perceive,
From taking up whatever offices
Involve the whole world's safety or mishap,
Into their mild hands as a thing of course!
The Statist finds it natural to lead
The mob who might as easily lead him--

LURIA

The Soldier marshals men who know as much—
Statist and Soldier verily believe!
While we poor scribes . . . you catch me thinking,
now,
That I shall in this very letter write
What none of you are able! To it, Lapo!

[DOMIZIA goes.]

This last, worst, all affected childish fit
Of Luria's, this be-praised unconsciousness,
Convinces me: the Past was no child's play;
It was a man beat Pisa,—not a child.
All's mere dissimulation—to remove
The fear, he best knows we should entertain.
The utmost danger was at hand. Is't written?
Now make a duplicate, lest this should fail,
And speak your fullest on the other side.

Sec. I noticed he was busily repairing
My half-effacement of his Duomo sketch,
And, while he spoke of Florence, turned to it,
As the Mage Negro King to Christ the Babe.—
I judge his childishness the true relapse
To boyhood of a man who has worked lately,
And presently will work, so, meantime, plays:
Whence more than ever I believe in him.

Brac. [after a pause.] The sword! At best, the
soldier, as he says,
In Florence—the black face, the barbarous name,
For Italy to boast her show of the age,
Her man of men!—To Florence with each letter!

ACT II

NOON

Dom. Well, Florence, shall I reach thee, pierce thy
heart
Thro' all its safeguards? Hate is said to help—
Quicken the eye, invigorate the arm,
And this my hate, made up of many hates,

LURIA

Might stand in scorn of visible instrument,
And will thee dead:—yet do I trust it not.
Nor Man's devices, nor Heaven's memory
Of wickedness forgot on Earth so soon,
But thy own nature,—Hell and thee I trust,
To keep thee constant in that wickedness,
Where my revenge may meet thee: turn aside
A single step, for gratitude, or shame,—
Grace but this Luria, this wild mass of rage
That I prepare to launch against thee now,
With other payment than thy noblest found,—
Give his desert for once its due reward,—
And past thee would my sure destruction roll.
But thou, who mad'st our House thy sacrifice,
It cannot be thou wilt except this Moor
From the accustomed fate of zeal and truth;
Thou wilt deny his looked-for recompense,
And then—I reach thee! Old and trained, my sire
Could bow down on his quiet broken heart,
Die awe-struck and submissive, when at last
The strange blow came for the expected wreath;
And Porzio passed in blind bewilderment
To exile, never to return,—they say,
Perplexed in his frank simple honest soul,
As if some natural law had changed,—how else
Could Florence, on plain fact pronouncing thus,
Judge Porzio's actions worthy such an end?
But Berto, with the ever-passionate pulse,
—Oh that long night, its dreadful hour on hour,
In which no way of getting his fair fame
From their inexplicable charges free,
Was found, save pouring forth the impatient blood
To show its colour whether false or no!
My brothers never had a friend like me
Close in their need to watch the time, then speak,
—Burst with a wakening laughter on their dream,
Say, Florence was all falseness, so false here,—
And show them what a simple task remained—
To leave dreams, rise, and punish in God's name
The City wedded to its wickedness—

LURIA

None stood by them as I by Luria stand!
So, when the stranger cheated of his due
Turns on thee as his rapid nature bids,
Then, Florence, think, a hireling at thy throat
For the first outrage, think who bore thy last.
Yet mutely in forlorn obedience died!
He comes . . . his friend . . . black faces in the camp
Where moved those peerless brows and eyes of old!

Enter LURIA and HUSAIN.

Dom. Well, and the movement—is it as you hope?
'Tis Lucca?

Lur. Ah, the Pisan trumpet merely!
Tiburzio's envoy, I must needs receive—

Dom. Whom I withdraw before; yet if I lingered
You could not wonder, for my time fleets fast;
The overtaking night brings such reward!—
And where will then be room for me? Yet still
Remember who was first to promise it,
And envies those who also can perform! *[Goes.]*

Lur. This trumpet from the Pisans?—

Hus. In the camp;
A very noble presence—Braccio's visage
On Puccio's body—calm and fixed and good;
A man I seem as I had seen before—
Most like, it was some statue had the face.

Lur. Admit him! This will prove the last delay!

Hus. Ay, friend, go on, and die thou going on!
Thou heard'st what the grave woman said but now:
To-night rewards thee! That is well to hear!
But stop not therefore; hear it, and go on!

Lur. Oh, their reward and triumph and the rest
They round me in the ears with, all day long?
All that, I never take for earnest, friend!
Well would it suit us,—their triumphal arch
Or storied pillar,—thee and me, the Moors!
But gratitude in those Italian eyes—
That, we shall get?

Hus. It is too cold an air—

LURIA

Our sun rose out of yonder mound of mist—
Where is he now? So I trust none of them!

Lur. Truly?

Hus. I doubt and fear. There stands a wall
'Twixt our expansive and explosive race
And those absorbing, concentrating men!
They use thee!

Lur. And I feel it, Husain; yes,
And care not—yes, an alien force like mine
Is only called to play its part outside
Their different nature; where its sole use seems
To fight with and keep off an adverse force
As alien,—which repelled, mine too withdraws;
Inside, they know not what to do with me;
So I have told them laughingly and oft,
But long since I prepared to learn the worst.

Hus. What is the worst?

Lur. I will forestall them, Husain
And speak my destiny, they dare not speak—
Banish myself before they find the heart!
I will be first to say, "the work rewards!"
"I know, for all your praise, my use is over,
"So may it be!—meanwhile 'tis best I go,
"And carry safe my memories of you all
"To other scenes of action, newer lands,"—
Thus leaving them confirmed in their belief
They would not easily have tired of me!
You think this hard to say?

Hus. Say it or not,
So thou but go, so they but let thee go!
This hating people, that hate each the other,
And in one blandness to us Moors unite—
Locked each to each like slippery snakes, I say,
Which still in all their tangles, hissing tongue
And threatening tail, ne'er do each other harm;
While any creature of a better blood,
They seem to fight for, while they circle safe
And never touch it,—pines without a wound,
Withers away before their eyes and breath.
See thou, if Puccio come not safely out

LURIA

Of Braccio's grasp, this Braccio sworn his foe,
As Braccio safely from Domizia's toils
Who hates him most!—But thou, the friend of all,
. . . Come out of them!

Lur. The Pisan trumpet now!

Hus. Breathe free—it is an enemy, no friend!

[Goes.]

Lur. He keeps his instincts, no new culture mars
Their perfect use in him; just so the brutes
Rest not, are anxious without visible cause,
When change is in the elements at work,
Which man's trained senses fail to apprehend.
But here,—he takes the distant chariot-wheels
For thunder, festal fire for lightning's flash,
The finer traits of cultivated life
For treachery and malevolence: I see!

Enter TIBURZIO.

Lur. Quick, sir, your message. I but wait your
message

To sound the charge. You bring not overtures
For truce?—I would not, for your General's sake,
You spoke of truce—a time to fight is come,
And whatsoe'er the fight's event, he keeps
His honest soldier's name to beat me with,
Or leaves me all himself to beat, I trust!

Tib. I am Tiburzio.

Lur. You? 'Tis—yes . . . Tiburzio!
You were the last to keep the ford i' the valley
From Puccio, when I threw in succours there!
Why, I was on the heights—thro' the defile
Ten minutes after, when the prey was lost;
You wore an open scull-cap with a twist
Of water-reeds—the plume being hewn away;
While I drove down my battle from the heights,
—I saw with my own eyes!

Tib. And you are Luria
Who sent my cohort, that laid down its arms
In error of the battle-signal's sense,

LURIA

Back safely to me at the critical time—
One of a hundred deeds—I know you! Therefore
To none but you could I . . .

Lur. No truce, Tiburzio!

Tib. Luria, you know the peril's imminent
On Pisa,—that you have us in the toils,
Us her last safeguard, all that intercepts
The rage of her implacablest of foes
From Pisa,—if we fall to-day, she falls.
Tho' Lucca will arrive, yet, 'tis too late.
You have so plainly here the best of it,
That you must feel, brave soldier as you are,
How dangerous we grow in this extreme,
How truly formidable by despair.
Still, probabilities should have their weight—
The extremest chance is ours, but, that chance failing,
You win this battle. Wherefore say I this?
To be well apprehended when I add,
This danger absolutely comes from you.

Were you, who threaten thus, a Florentine . . .

Lur. Sir, I am nearer Florence than her sons.
I can, and have perhaps obliged the State,
Nor paid a mere son's duty.

Tib. Even so!
Were you the son of Florence, yet endued
With all your present nobleness of soul,
No question, what I must communicate
Would not detach you from her.

Lur. Me, detach?

Tib. Time urges: you will ruin presently
Pisa, you never knew, for Florence' sake
You think you know. I have from time to time
Made prize of certain secret missives sent
From Braccio here, the Commissary, home—
And knowing Florence otherwise, I piece
The entire chain out, from these its scattered links.
Your trial occupies the Signory;
They sit in judgment on your conduct now!
When men at home enquire into the acts
Which in the field e'en foes appreciate . . .

LURIA

Brief, they are Florentines! You, saving them,
Will seek the sure destruction saviours find.

Lur. Tiburzio—

Tib. All the wonder is of course!

I am not here to teach you, nor direct,
Only to loyally apprise—scarce that.
This is the latest letter, sealed and safe,
As it left here an hour ago. One way
Of two thought free to Florence, I command.
The duplicate is on its road: but this,—
Read it, and then I shall have more to say.

Lur. Florence!

Tib. Now, were yourself a Florentine,
This letter, let it hold the worst it can,
Would be no reason you should fall away—
The Mother city is the mother still,
And recognition of the children's service
Her own affair; reward—there's no reward!
But you are bound by quite another tie;
Nor Nature shows, nor Reason, why at first
A foreigner, born friend to all alike,
Should give himself to any special State
More than another, stand by Florence' side
Rather than Pisa's—'tis as fair a city
You war against, as that you fight for—famed
As well as she in story, graced no less
With noble heads and patriotic hearts,—
Nor to a stranger's eye would either cause,
Stripped of the cumulative loves and hates
Which take importance from familiar view,
Stand as the Right, and Sole to be upheld.
Therefore, should the preponderating gift
Of love and trust, Florence was first to throw,
Which made you hers not Pisa's, void the scale,—
Old ties dissolving, things resume their place
And all begins again. Break seal and read!
At least let Pisa offer for you now!
And I, as a good Pisan, shall rejoice—
Tho' for myself I lose, in gaining you,
This last fight and its opportunity;

LURIA

The chance it brings of saving Pisa yet,
Or in the turn of battle dying so
That shame should want its extreme bitterness.

Lur. Tiburzio, you that fight for Pisa now
As I for Florence . . . say my chance were yours!
You read this letter, and you find . . . no, no!
Too mad!

Tib. I read the letter, find they purpose
When I have crushed their foe, to crush me: well?

Lur. You, being their captain, what is it you do?

Tib. Why as it is, all cities are alike—
Pisa will pay me much as Florence you;
I shall be as belied, whate'er the event,
As you, or more: my weak head, they will say,
Prompted this last expedient, my faint heart
Entailed on them indelible disgrace,
Both which defects ask proper punishment.
Another tenure of obedience, mine!
You are no son of Pisa's: break and read!

Lur. And act on what I read? What act were fit?
If the firm-fixed foundation of my faith
In Florence, which to me stands for Mankind,
—If that breaks up and, disemprisoning
From the abyss . . . Ah friend, it cannot be!
You may be very sage, yet . . . all the world
Having to fail, or your sagacity,
You do not wish to find yourself alone
What would the world be worth? Whose love be
sure?

The world remains—you are deceived!

Tib. . . . Your hand!
I lead the vanguard.—If you fall, beside,
The better—I am left to speak! For me,
This was my duty, nor would I rejoice
If I could help, it misses its effect:
And after all you will look gallantly
Found dead here with that letter in your breast!

Lur. Tiburzio—I would see these people once
And test them ere I answer finally!
At your arrival let the trumpet sound:

LURIA

If mine returns not then the wonted cry,
It means that I believe—am Pisa's!

Tib.

Well! [Goes.

Lur. My heart will have it he speaks true! My blood
Beats close to this Tiburzio as a friend.
If he had stept into my watch-tent, night
And the wild desert full of foes around,
I should have broke the bread and given the salt
Secure, and, when my hour of watch was done,
Taken my turn to sleep between his knees,
Safe in the untroubled brow and honest cheek.
Oh, world, where all things pass and nought abides,
Oh, life the long mutation—is it so?
Is it with life as with the body's change?
—Where, e'en tho' better follow, good must pass,
Nor manhood's strength can mate with boyhood's grace,
Nor age's wisdom, in its turn, find strength,
But silently the first gift dies away,
And tho' the new stays, never both at once!
Life's time of savage instinct's o'er with me,
It fades and dies away, past trusting more,
As if to punish the ingratitude
With which I turned to grow in these new lights,
And learned to look with European eyes.
Yet it is better, this cold certain way,
Where Braccio's brow tells nothing,—Puccio's mouth,
Domizia's eyes reject the searcher—yes—
For on their calm sagacity I lean,
Their sense of right, deliberate choice of good,
Sure, as they know my deeds, they deal with me.
Yes, that is better—that is best of all!
Such faith stays when mere wild belief would go!
Yes—when the desert creature's heart, at fault
Amid the scattering tempest's pillared sands,
Betrays its steps into the pathless drift—
The calm instructed eye of man holds fast
By the sole bearing of the visible star,
Sure that when slow the whirling wreck subsides,
The boundaries, lost now, shall be found again,—
The palm-trees and the pyramid over all.

LURIA

Yes: I trust Florence—Pisa is deceived!

Enter BRACCIO, PUCCIO, and DOMIZIA.

Brac. Noon's at an end: no Lucca? You must fight.

Lur. Do you remember ever, gentle friends,
I am no Florentine?

Dom. It is yourself

Who still are forcing us importunately,
To bear in mind what else we should forget.

Lur. For loss!—For what I lose in being none!
No shrewd man, such as you yourselves respect,
But would remind you of the stranger's loss
In natural friends and advocates at home,
Hereditary loves, even rivalships,
With precedents for honour and reward.
Still, there's a gain, too! If you take it so,
The stranger's lot has special gain as well!
Do you forget there was my own far East
I might have given away myself to, once,
As now to Florence, and for such a gift,
Stood there like a descended Deity?
There, worship greets us! what do I get here?

[Shows the letter.]

See! Chance has put into my hand the means
Of knowing what I earn, before I work!
Should I fight better, should I fight the worse,
With your crown palpably before me? see!
Here lies my whole reward! Best know it now,
Or keep it for the end's entire delight?

Brac. If you serve Florence as the vulgar serve,
For swordsman's pay alone,—break seal and read!
In that case, you will find your full desert!

Lur. Give me my one last happy moment, friends!
You need me now, and all the gratitude
This letter can contain will never balance
The after-feeling that your need's at end!
This moment . . . Oh, the East has use with you!
Its sword still nashes—is not flung aside
With the past praise, in a dark corner yet!

LURIA

How say you? 'Tis not so with Florentines—
Captains of yours—for them, the ended war
Is but a first step to the peace begun
—He who did well in war, just earns the right
To begin doing well in peace, you know!
And certain my precursors,—would not such
Look to themselves in such a chance as this,
Secure the ground they trod upon, perhaps?
For I have heard, by fits, or seemed to hear,
Of strange occurrences, ingratitude,
Treachery even,—say that one of you
Surmised this letter carried what might turn
To harm hereafter, cause him prejudice—
What would he do?

Dom. [*hastily.*] Thank God and take revenge!
Turn her own force against the city straight,
And even at the moment when the foe
Sounded defiance . . .

[*TIBURZIO's trumpet sounds in the distance.*]

Lur. Ah, you Florentines!
So would you do? Wisely for you, no doubt!
My simple Moorish instinct bids me sink
The obligation you relieve me from,
Still deeper! [*to Puc.*] Sound our answer, I should say!
And thus:—[*tearing the paper*]—The battle! That solves
every doubt!

ACT III

AFTERNOON

PUCCIO, as making a report to JACOPO

Puc. And here, your Captain must report the rest;
For, as I say, the main engagement over,
And Luria's special part in it performed,
How could subalterns like myself expect
Leisure or leave to occupy the field

LURIA

And glean what dropped from his wide harvesting?
I thought, when Lucca at the battle's end
Came up, just as the Pisan centre broke,
That Luria would detach me and prevent
The flying Pisans seeking what they found,
Friends in the rear, a point to rally by:
But no—more honourable proved my post!
I had the august captive to escort
Safe to our camp—some other could pursue,
Fight, and be famous; gentler chance was mine—
Tiburzio's wounded spirit must be soothed!
He's in the tent there.

Jac. Is the substance down?
I write—"The vanguard beaten, and both wings
In full retreat—Tiburzio prisoner"—
And now,—“That they fell back and formed again
On Lucca's coming.”—Why then, after all,
'Tis half a victory, no conclusive one?

Puc. Two operations where a sole had served.

Jac. And Luria's fault was—?

Puc. Oh, for fault . . . not much!
He led the attack, a thought impetuously,
—There's commonly more prudence; now, he seemed
To hurry measures, otherwise well-judged;
By over concentrating strength, at first,
Against the enemy's van, both sides escaped:
That's reparable—yet it is a fault.

Enter BRACCIO.

Jac. As good as a full victory to Florence,
With the advantage of a fault beside—
What is it, Puccio?—that by pressing forward
With too impetuous . . .

Brac. The report anon!
Thanks, Sir—you have elsewhere a charge, I know.
[PUCCIO goes.]

There's nothing done but I would do again;
Yet, Lapo, it may be the Past proves nothing,
And Luria has kept faithful to the end!

LURIA

Jac. I was for waiting.

Brac.

Yes: so was not I!

He could not choose but tear that letter—true!

Still, certain of his tones, I mind, and looks—

You saw, too, with a fresher soul than I.

So, Porzio seemed an injured man, they say!

Well, I have gone upon the broad, sure ground.

Enter LURIA, PUCCIO, and DOMIZIA.

Lur. [to PUC.] Say, at his pleasure I will see Tiburzio:
All's at his pleasure.

Dom. [to LUR.] Were I not so sure
You would reject, as you do constantly,
Praise,—I might tell you what you have deserved
Of Florence by this last and crowning feat:
But words are vain!

Lur. Nay, you may praise me now!
I want instruction every hour, I find,
On points where once I saw least need of it;
And praise, I have been used to do without,
Seems not so easy to dispense with now,
After a battle half one's strength is gone—
And glorious passion in us once appeased,
Our reason's calm cold dreadful voice begins.
All justice, power and beauty scarce appear
Monopolized by Florence, as of late,
To me, the stranger; you, no doubt, may know
Why Pisa needs must give her rival place;
And I am growing nearer you, perhaps,
For I, too, want to know and be assured,
When a cause ceases to reward itself,
Its friend needs fresh sustainments; praise is one,
And here stand you—you, Lady, praise me well!
But yours—(your pardon)—is unlearned praise:
To the motive, the endeavour, the heart's self,
Your quick sense looks; you crown and call aright
The soul of the purpose, ere 'tis shaped as act,
Takes flesh i' the world, and clothes itself a king;
But when the act comes, stands for what 'tis worth,

LURIA

—Here's Puccio, the skilled soldier ; he's my judge !
Was all well, Puccio ?

Puc. All was . . . must be well :
If we beat Lucca presently, as doubtless . . .

—No, there's no doubt, we must—All was well done.

Lur. In truth ? But you are of the trade, my
Puccio !

You have the fellow-craftsman's sympathy !
There's none knows like a fellow of the craft,
The all unestimated sum of pains
That go to a success the world can see ;
They praise then, but the best they never know :
—But you know !—Oh, if envy mix with it,
Hate even, still the bottom praise of all,
Whatever be the dregs, that drop's pure gold !
—For nothing's like it ; nothing else records
Those daily, nightly drippings in the dark
Of the heart's blood, the world lets drop away
For ever . . . So, pure gold that praise must be !
And I have yours, my soldier : yet the best
Is still to come—there's one looks on apart
Whom all refers to, failure or success ;
What's done might be our best, our utmost work,
And yet inadequate to serve his need :
Here's Braccio now, for Florence—here's our service—
Well done for us, is it well done for him ?
His chosen engine, tasked to its full strength
Answers his end ?—Should he have chosen higher ?
Do we help Florence, now our best is done ?

Brac. This battle with the foregone services,
Saves Florence.

Lur. Why then, all is very well !
Here am I in the middle of my friends,
Who know me and who love me, one and all !
And yet . . . 'tis like . . . this instant while I speak
Is like the turning moment of a dream
When . . . Ah, you are not foreigners like me !
Well then, one always dreams of friends at home,
And always comes, I say, the turning point
When something changes in the friendly eyes

LURIA

That love and look on you . . . so slight, so slight . . .
And yet it tells you they are dead and gone,
Or changed and enemies, for all their words,
And all is mockery, and a maddening show!
You, now, so kind here, all you Florentines,
What is it in your eyes . . . those lips, those brows . . .
Nobody spoke it . . . yet I know it well!—
Come now—this battle saves you, all's at end,
Your use of me is o'er, for good, for evil,—
Come now, what's done against me, while I speak,
In Florence? Come! I feel it in my blood,
My eyes, my hair, a voice is in my ear
That spite of all this smiling and kind speech
You are betraying me! What is it you do?
Have it your way, and think my use is over;
That you are saved and may throw off the mask—
Have it my way, and think more work remains
Which I could do,—so show you fear me not!
Or prudent be, or generous, as you choose,
But tell me—tell what I refused to know
At noon, lest heart should fail me! Well? That
letter?

My fate is known at Florence! What is it?

Brac. Sir, I shall not conceal what you divine:
It is no novelty for innocence
To be suspected, but a privilege:
The after certain compensation comes.
Charges, I say not whether false or true,
Have been preferred against you some time since,
Which Florence was bound, plainly, to receive,
And which are therefore undergoing now
The due investigation. That is all.
I doubt not but your innocence will shine
Apparent and illustrious, as to me,
To them this evening, when the trial ends

Lur. My trial?

Dom. Florence, Florence to the end,
My whole heart thanks thee!

Puc. [to BRAC.] What is "Trial," Sir?
It was not for a trial—surely, no—

LURIA

I furnished you those notes from time to time?
I hold myself aggrieved—I am a man—
And I might speak,—ay, and speak mere truth, too,
And yet not mean at bottom of my heart
What should assist a—Trial, do you say?
You should have told me!

Dom.

Nay, go on, go on!

His sentence! Do they sentence him? What is it?
The block? Wheel?

Brac.

Sentence there is none as yet,

Nor shall I give my own opinion here
Of what it should be, or is like to be,
When it is passed, applaud or disapprove!
Up to that point, what is there to impugn?

Lur. They are right, then, to try me?

Brac.

I assert,

Maintain, and justify the absolute right
Of Florence to do all she can have done
In this procedure,—standing on her guard,
Receiving even services like yours
With utmost fit suspicious wariness.
In other matters—keep the mummerly up!
Take all the experiences of the whole world,
Each knowledge that broke thro' a heart to life,
Each reasoning which, to work out, cost a brain,
—In other cases, know these, warrant these,
And then dispense with them—'tis very well!
Let friend trust friend, and love demand its like,
And gratitude be claimed for benefits,—
There's grace in that—and when the fresh heart
breaks,

The new brain proves a martyr, what of it?
Where is the matter of one moth the more
Singed in the candle, at a summer's end?
But Florence is no simple John or James
To have his toy, his fancy, his conceit,
That he's the one excepted man by fate,
And, when fate shows him he's mistaken there,
Die with all good men's praise, and yield his place
To Paul and George intent to try their chance:

LURIA

Florence exists because these pass away;
She's a contrivance to supply a type
Of Man, which men's deficiencies refuse;
She binds so many, that she grows out of them—
Stands steady o'er their numbers, tho' they change
And pass away—there's always what upholds,
Always enough to fashion the great show!
As, see, yon hanging city, in the sun,
Of shapely cloud substantially the same!
A thousand vapours rise and sink again,
Are interfused, and live their life and die,—
Yet ever hangs the steady show i' the air
Under the sun's straight influence: that is well!
That is worth Heaven to hold, and God to bless!
And so is Florence,—the unseen sun above,
Which draws and holds suspended all of us—
Binds transient mists and vapours into one,
Differing from each and better than they all.
And shall she dare to stake this permanence
On any one man's faith? Man's heart is weak,
And its temptations many: let her prove
Each servant to the very uttermost
Before she grant him her reward, I say!

Dom. And as for hearts she chances to mistake,
That are not destined to receive reward,
Tho' they deserve it, did she only know!
—What should she do for these?

Brac. What does she not?
Say, that she gives them but herself to serve!
Here's Luria—what had profited his strength,
When half an hour of sober fancying
Had shown him step by step the uselessness
Of strength exerted for its proper sake?
But the truth is, she did create that strength,
Drew to the end the corresponding means.
The world is wide—are we the only men?
Oh, for the time, the social purpose' sake,
Use words agreed on, bandy epithets,
Call any man, sole Great and Wise and Good!
But shall we, therefore, standing by ourselves,

LURIA

Insult our souls and God with the same speech?
There, swarm the ignoble thousands under Him—
What marks us from the hundreds and the tens?
Florence took up, turned all one way the soul
Of Luria with its fires, and here he stands!
She takes me out of all the world as him,
Fixing my coldness till like ice it stays
The fire! So, Braccio, Luria, which is best?

Lur. Ah, brave me? And is this indeed the way
To gain your good word and sincere esteem?
Am I the baited tiger that must turn
And fight his baiters to deserve their praise?
Obedience has no fruit then?—Be it so!
Do you indeed remember I stand here
The Captain of the conquering army,—mine—
With all your tokens, praise and promise, ready
To show for what their names were when you gave,
Not what you style them now you take away?
If I call in my troops to arbitrate,
And in their first enthusiastic thrill
Of victory, tell them how you menace me—
Commending to their plain instinctive sense,
My story first, your comment afterward,—
Will they take, think you, part with you or me?
When I say simply, I, the man they know,
Ending my work, ask payment, and find Florence
Has all this while provided silently
Against the day of pay and proving words,
By what you call my sentence that's to come—
Will they sit waiting it complacently?
When I resist that sentence at their head
What will you do, my mild antagonist?

Brac. I will rise up like fire, proud and triumphant
That Florence knew you thoroughly and by me,
And so was saved: "See, Italy," I'll say,
"The need of our precautions—here's a man
"Was far advanced, just touched on the reward
"Less subtle cities had accorded him—
"But we were wiser; at the end comes this!"
And from that minute all your strength will go—

LURIA

The very stones of Florence cry against
The all-exacting, unenduring Luria,
Resenting her first slight probation thus,
As if he, only, shone and cast no shade,
He, only, walked the earth with privilege
Against suspicion, free from causing fear—
So, for the first inquisitive mother's-word,
He turned, and stood on his defence, forsooth!
Reward? You will not be worth punishment!

Lur. And Florence knew me thus! Thus I have
lived,—

And thus you, with the clear fine intellect,
Braccio, the cold acute instructed mind,
Out of the stir, so calm and unconfused,
Reported me—how could you otherwise!
Ay?—and what dropped from *you*, just now, more-
over?

Your information, Puccio?—Did your skill
And understanding sympathy approve
Such a report of me? Was this the end?
Or is even this the end? Can I stop here—
You, Lady, with the woman's stand apart,
The heart to see with, not those learned eyes,
. . . I cannot fathom why you should destroy
The unoffending man, you call your friend—
So, looking at the good examples here
Of friendship, 'tis but natural I ask
Had you a further end, in all you spoke,
Than profit to me, in those instances
Of perfidy from Florence to her chiefs—
All I remember now for the first time?

Dom. I am a daughter of the Traversari,
Sister of Porzio and of Berto both.
I have foreseen all that has come to pass.
I knew the Florence that could doubt their faith,
Must needs mistrust a stranger's—holding back
Reward from them, must hold back his reward.
And I believed, the shame they bore and died,
He would not bear, but live and fight against—
Seeing he was of other stuff than they.

LURIA

Lur. Hear them! All these against one Foreigner!
And all this while, where is in the whole world
To his good faith a single witness?

Tiburzio [*who has entered during the preceding dialogue.*] Here!

Thus I bear witness to it, not in word
But deed. I live for Pisa; she's not lost
By many chances—much prevents from that!
Her army has been beaten, I am here,
But Lucca comes at last, one chance exists.
I rather had see Pisa three times lost
Than saved by any traitor, even by you.
The example of a traitor's happy fortune
Would bring more evil in the end than good.
Pisa rejects such: save yourself and her!
I, in her name, resign forthwith to you
My charge,—the highest of her offices.
You shall not, by my counsel, turn on Florence
Her army, give her calumny that ground—
Nor bring it with you: be you all we gain,
And all she'll lose, a head to deck some bridge,
And save the crown's cost that should deck the head.
Leave her to perish in her perfidy,
Plague-stricken and stripped naked to all eyes,
A proverb and a by-word in all mouths!
Go you to Pisa—Florence is my place—
Leave me to tell her of the rectitude,
I, from the first, told Pisa, knowing it.
To Pisa!

Dom. Ah, my Braccio, are you caught?

Brac. Puccio, good soldier and selected man,
Whom I have ever kept beneath my eye,
Ready, as fit, to serve in this event
Florence, who clear foretold it from the first—
Thro' me, she gives you the command and charge
She takes, thro' me, from him who held it late!
A painful trial, very sore, was yours:
All that could draw out, marshal in array
The selfish passions 'gainst the public good—
Slights, scorns, neglects, were heaped on you to bear:

LURIA

And ever you did bear and bow the head!
It had been sorry trial, to precede
Your feet, hold up the promise of reward
For luring gleam; your footsteps kept the track
Thro' dark and doubt: take all the light at once!
Trial is over, consummation shines;
Well have you served, as well henceforth command!

Puc. No, no . . . I dare not . . . I am grateful,
glad;

But Luria—you shall understand he's wronged—
And he's my Captain—this is not the way
We soldiers climb to fortune: think again!
The sentence is not even passed, beside!
I dare not . . . where's the soldier could?

Lur. Now, Florence—

Is it to be?—You will know all the strength
Of the savage—to your neck the proof must go?
You will prove the brute nature? Ah, I see!
The savage plainly is impassible—
He keeps his calm way thro' insulting words
Sarcastic looks, sharp gestures—one of which
Would stop you, fatal to your finer sense:
But if he steadily advances, still
Without a mark upon his callous hide,
Thro' the mere brushwood you grow angry with,
And leave the tatters of your flesh upon,
—You have to learn that when the true bar comes,
The thick mid forest, the real obstacle,
Which when you reach, you give the labour up,
Nor dash on, but lie down composed before,
—He goes against it, like the brute he is!
It falls before him, or he dies in his course!
I kept my course thro' past ingratitude—
I saw—it does seem, now, as if I saw,
Could not but see, those insults as they fell,
—Ay, let them glance from off me, very like,
Laughing, perhaps, to think the quality
You grew so bold on, while you so despised
The Moor's dull mute inapprehensive mood,
Was saving you; I bore and kept my course:

LURIA

Now real wrong fronts me—see if I succumb!
Florence withstands me?—I will punish her!

At night my sentence will arrive, you say!
Till then I cannot, if I would, rebel—
—Unauthorised to lay my office down,
Retaining my full power to will and do:
After—is it to see. Tiburzio, thanks!
Go—you are free—join Lucca. I suspend
All further operations till to-night.
Thank you, and for the silence most of all!
[*To Brac.*] Let my complacent bland accuser go,
And carry his self-approving head and heart
Safe thro' the army which would trample him
Dead in a moment at my word or sign!
Go, Sir, to Florence; tell friends what I say—
That while I wait their sentence, theirs waits them!
[*To Dom.*] You, Lady,—you have black Italian eyes!
I would be generous if I might. . . . Oh, yes—
For I remember how so oft you seemed
Inclined at heart to break the barrier down
Which Florence makes God build between us both.
Alas, for generosity! this hour
Demands strict justice—bear it as you may!
I must—the Moor,—the Savage,—pardon you!
[*To Puc.*] Puccio, my trusty soldier, see them forth!—

ACT IV

EVENING

Enter PUCCIO and JACOPO

Puc. What Luria *will* do? Ah, 'tis yours, fair Sir,
Your and your subtle-witted master's part,
To tell me that; I tell you what he can.

Jac. Friend, you mistake my station! I observe
The game, watch how my betters play, no more.

LURIA

Puc. But mankind are not pieces—there's your fault!

You cannot push them, and, the first move made,
Lean back to study what the next should be,
In confidence that when 'tis fixed upon,
You'll find just where you left them, blacks and
whites :

Men go on moving when your hand's away.
You build, I notice, firm on Luria's faith
This whole time,—firmlier than I choose to build,
Who never doubted it—of old, that is—
With Luria in his ordinary mind :
But now, oppression makes the wise man mad—
How do I know he will not turn and stand
And hold his own against you, as he may?
Suppose that he withdraws to Pisa—well,—
Then, even if all happens to your wish,
Which is a chance . . .

Jac. Nay—'twas an oversight,
Not waiting till the proper warrant came :
You could not take what was not ours to give.
But when at night the sentence really comes,
And Florence authorizes past dispute
Luria's removal and your own advance,
You will perceive your duty and accept?

Puc. Accept what? muster-rolls of soldiers' names?
An army upon paper?—I want men,
Their hearts as well as hands—and where's a heart
That's not with Luria, in the multitude
I come from walking thro' by Luria's side?
You gave him to them, set him on to grow,
Head-like, upon their trunk, one blood feeds both,
They feel him there, and live, and well know why!
—For they do know, if you are ignorant,
Who kept his own place and respected theirs,
Managed their ease, yet never spared his own.
All was your deed : another might have served—
There's peradventure no such dearth of men—
But you chose Luria—so they grew to him :
And now, for nothing they can understand,

LURIA

Luria's removed, off is to roll the head—
The body's mine—much I shall do with it!

Jac. That's at the worst!

Puc. No—at the best, it is!

Best, do you hear? I saw them by his side;
Only we two with Luria in the camp
Are left that know the secret? You think that?
Hear what I saw: from rear to van, no heart
But felt the quiet patient hero there
Was wronged, nor in the moveless ranks an eye
But glancing told its fellow the whole story
Of that convicted silent knot of spies
Who passed thro' them to Florence; they might pass—
No breast but gladlier beat when free of them!
Our troops will catch up Luria, close him round,
Lead him to Florence as their natural lord,
Partake his fortunes, live or die with him!

Jac. And by mistake catch up along with him
Puccio, no doubt, compelled in self-despite
To still continue Second in Command!

Puc. No, Sir, no second nor so fortunate!
Your tricks succeed with me too well for that!
I am as you have made me, and shall die
A mere trained fighting hack to serve your end;
With words, you laugh at while they leave your
mouth,

For my life's rules and ordinance of God!
I have to do my duty, keep my faith,
And earn my praise, and guard against my blame,
As I was trained. I shall accept your charge,
And fight against one better than myself,
And my own heart's conviction of his worth—
That, you may count on!—just as hitherto
I have gone on, persuaded I was wronged,
Slighted, and all the terms we learn by rote,—
All because Luria superseded me—
Because the better nature, fresh-inspired,
Mounted above me to its proper place!
What mattered all the kindly graciousness,
And cordial brother's bearing? This was clear—

LURIA

I, once the captain, was subaltern now,
And so must keep complaining like a fool!
Go, take the curse of a lost man, I say!
You neither play your puppets to the end,
Nor treat the real man,—for his realness' sake
Thrust rudely in their place,—with such regard
As might console them for their altered rank.
Me, the mere steady soldier, you depose
For Luria, and here's all that he deserves!
Of what account, then, are my services?
One word for all: whatever Luria does,
—If backed by his indignant troops he turns
In self-defence and Florence goes to ground,—
Or for a signal, everlasting shame,
He pardons you, and simply seeks his friends
And heads the Pisan and the Lucchese troops
—And if I, for you ingrates past belief,
Resolve to fight against a man called false,
Who, inasmuch as he is true, fights there—
Whichever way he wins, he wins for me,
For every soldier, for the common good!
Sir, chronicling the rest, omit not this!

As they go, enter LURIA and HUSAIN.

Hus. Saw'st thou?—For they are gone! The world
lies bare

Before thee, to be tasted, felt and seen
Like what it is, now Florence goes away!
Thou livest now, with men art man again!
Those Florentines were eyes to thee of old;
But Braccio, but Domizia, gone is each—
There lie beneath thee thine own multitudes—
Sawest thou?

Lur. I saw.

Hus. Then, hold thy course, my King!
The years return. Let thy heart have its way!
Ah, they would play with thee as with all else?
Turn thee to use, and fashion thee anew,
Find out God's fault in thee as in the rest?
Oh, watch but, listen only to these men
Once at their occupation! Ere ye know,

LURIA

The free great heaven is shut, their stifling pall
Drops till it frets the very tingling hair—
So weighs it on our head,—and, for the earth,
Our common earth is tethered up and down,
Over and across—here shalt thou move, they say!

Lur. Ay, Husain?

Hus. So have they spoiled all beside!

So stands a man girt round with Florentines,
Priests, greybeards, Braccios, women, boys and spies,
All in one tale, each singing the same song,
How thou must house, and live at bed and board,
Take pledge and give it, go their every way,
Breathe to their measure, make thy blood beat time
With theirs—or—all is nothing—thou art lost—
A savage . . . how shouldst thou perceive as they?
Feel glad to stand 'neath God's close naked hand!
Look up to it! Why, down they pull thy neck,
Lest it crush thee, who feel'st it and wouldst kiss,
Without their priests that needs must glove it first,
Lest peradventure it should wound thy lip!
Love Woman! Why, a very beast thou art!
Thou must . . .

Lur. Peace, Husain!

Hus. Ay, but, spoiling all,

For all, else true, things substituting false,
That they should dare spoil, of all instincts, thine!
Should dare to take thee with thine instincts up,
Thy battle-ardours, like a ball of fire,
And class them and allow them place and play
So far, no farther—unabashed the while!
Thou with the soul that never can take rest—
Thou born to do, undo, and do again,
But never to be still,—wouldst thou make war?
Oh, that is commendable, just and right!
Come over, say they, have the honour due
In living out thy nature! Fight thy best—
It is to be for Florence not thyself!
For thee, it were a horror and a plague—
For us, when war is made for Florence, see,
How all is changed—the fire that fed on earth

LURIA

Now towers to heaven!—

Lur. And what sealed up so long
My Husain's mouth?

Hus. Oh, friend, oh, lord—for me,
What am I?—I was silent at thy side,
That am a part of thee—It is thy hand,
Thy foot that glows when in the heart fresh blood
Boils up, thou heart of me! Now live again!
Again love as thou likest, hate as free!
Turn to no Braccios nor Domizias now,
To ask, before thy very limbs dare move,
If Florence' welfare be concerned thereby!

Lur. So clear what Florence must expect of me?

Hus. Both armies against Florence! Take revenge!
Wide, deep—to live upon, in feeling now,—
And after, in remembrance, year by year—
And, with the dear conviction, die at last!
She lies now at thy pleasure—pleasure have!
Their vaunted intellect that gilds our sense,
And blends with life, to show it better by,
—How think'st thou?—I have turned that light on
them!

They called our thirst of war a transient thing;
The battle-element must pass away
From life, they said and leave a tranquil world:
—Master, I took their light and turned it full
On that dull turgid vein they said would burst
And pass away; and as I looked on Life,
Still everywhere I tracked this, though it hid
And shifted, lay so silent as it thought,
Changed oft the hue yet ever was the same:
Why, 'twas all fighting, all their nobler life!
All work was fighting, every harm—defeat,
And every joy obtained—a victory!
Be not their dupe!

—Their dupe? That hour is past!
Here stand'st thou in the glory and the calm!
All is determined! Silence for me now!

[HUSAIN goes.]

Lur. Have I heard all?

LURIA

Dom. [advancing from the background.] No, Luria,
I am here!

Not from the motives these have urged on thee,
Ignoble, insufficient, incomplete,
And pregnant each with sure seeds of decay,
As failing of sustainment from thyself,
—Neither from low revenge, nor selfishness,
Nor savage lust of power, nor one, nor all,
Shalt thou abolish Florence! I proclaim
The angel in thee, and reject the spirits
Which ineffectual crowd about his strength,
And mingle with his work and claim a share!
—Inconsciously to the augustest end
Thou hast arisen: second not in rank
So much as time, to him who first ordained
That Florence, thou art to destroy, should be—
Yet him a star, too, guided, who broke first
The pride of lonely power, the life apart,
And made the eminences, each to each,
Lean o'er the level world and let it lie
Safe from the thunder henceforth 'neath their arms—
So the few famous men of old combined,
And let the multitude rise underneath,
And reach them, and unite—so Florence grew!
Braccio speaks well, it was well worth the price.
But when the sheltered Many grew in pride
And grudged the station of the glorious ones,
Who, greater than their kind, are truly great
Only in voluntary servitude—
Time was for thee to rise, and thou art here.
Such plague possessed this Florence—who can tell
The mighty girth and greatness at the heart
Of those so noble pillars of the grove
She pulled down in her envy? Who as I,
The light weak parasite born but to twine
Round each of them and, measuring them, so live?
My light love keeps the matchless circle safe,
My slender life proves what has past away!
I lived when they departed; lived to cling
To thee, the mighty stranger; thou would'st rise

LURIA

And burst the thralldom, and avenge, I knew.
I have done nothing; all was thy strong heart:
But a bird's weight can break the infant tree
Which after holds an aery in its arms,
And 'twas my care that nought should warp thy spire
From rising to the height; the roof is reached—
Break through and there is all the sky above!
Go on to Florence, Luria! 'Tis man's cause!
Fail thou, and thine own fall is least to dread!
Thou keepest Florence in her evil way,
Encouragest her sin so much the more—
And while the bloody past is justified,
Thou all the surelier dost work against
The men to come, the Lurias yet unborn,
Who, greater than thyself, are reached o'er thee
That giv'st the vantage-ground their foes require,
As o'er my prostrate House thyself was't reached!
Man calls thee—God shall judge thee: all is said,
The mission of my House fulfilled at last!
And the mere woman, speaking for herself,
Reserves speech; it is now no woman's time.

[DOMIZIA goes.]

Lur. So at the last must figure Luria, then!
Doing the various work of all his friends,
And answering every purpose save his own.
No doubt, 'tis well for them to wish; for him—
After the exploit what is left? Perchance
A little pride upon the swarthy brow,
At having brought successfully to bear
'Gainst Florence' self her own especial arms,—
Her craftiness, impelled by fiercer strength
From Moorish blood than feeds the northern wit—
But after!—once the easy vengeance willed,
Beautiful Florence at a word laid low
—(Not in her Domes and Towers and Palaces,
Not even in a dream, that outrage!)—low,
As shamed in her own eyes henceforth for ever,
Low, for the rival cities round to see
Conquered and pardoned by a hireling Moor!
—For him, who did the irreparable wrong,

LURIA

What would be left, his life's illusion fled,—
What hope or trust in the forlorn wide world?
How strange that Florence should mistake me so!
How grew this? What withdrew her faith from me?
Some cause! These fretful-blooded children talk
Against their mother,—they are wronged, they say—
Notable wrongs a smile makes up again!
So, taking fire at each supposed offence,
They may speak rashly, suffer for rash speech—
But what could it have been in word or deed
That injured me? Some one word spoken more
Out of my heart, and all had changed perhaps!
My fault, it must have been,—for what gain they?
Why risk the danger? See, what I could do!
And my fault, wherefore visit upon them,
My Florentines? The generous revenge,
I meditate! To stay here passively,
Go at their summons, be as they dispose—
Why, if my very soldiers keep their ranks,
And if I pacify my chiefs, what then?
I ruin Florence—teach her friends mistrust—
Confirm her enemies in harsh belief—
And when she finds one day, as she must find,
The strange mistake, and how my heart was hers,
Shall it console me, that my Florentines
Walk with a sadder step, a graver face,
Who took me with such frankness, praised me so,
At the glad outset! Had they loved me less,
They had less feared what seemed a change in me.
And after all, who did the harm? Not they!
How could they interpose with those old fools
In the council? Suffer for those old fools' sakes—
They, who made pictures of me, sang the songs
About my battles? Ah, we Moors get blind
Out of our proper world where we can see!
The sun that guides is closer to us! There—
There, my own orb! He sinks from out the sky!
Why, there! a whole day has he blessed the land,
My land, our Florence all about the hills,
The fields and gardens, vineyards, olive-grounds,

LURIA

All have been blest—and yet we Florentines
With minds intent upon our battle here,
Found that he rose too soon, or else too late,
Gave us no vantage, or gave Pisa more—
And so we wronged him! Does he turn in ire
To burn the earth, that cannot understand?
Or drop out quietly, and leave the sky,
His task once ended? Night wipes blame away:
Another morning from my East shall rise
And find all eyes at leisure, more disposed
To watch it and approve its work, no doubt.
So, praise the new sun, the successor praise!
Praise the new Luria, and forget the old!

[Taking a phial from his breast.]

—Strange! This is all I brought from my own Land
To help me—Europe would supply the rest,
All needs beside, all other helps save this!
I thought of adverse fortune, battles lost,
The natural upbraidings of the loser,
And then this quiet remedy to seek
At end of the disastrous day—

[He drinks.]

'Tis sought!

This was my happy triumph-morning: Florence
Is saved: I drink this, and ere night,—die!—Strange!

ACT V

NIGHT

LURIA. PUCCIO

Lur. I thought to do this, not to talk this: well!
Such were my projects for the City's good,
To save her from attack or by defence.
Time, here as elsewhere, soon or late may take
Our foresight by surprise with chance and change;
But not a little we provide against
—If you see clear on every point.

LURIA

Puc.

Most clear.

Lur. Then all is said—not much, if you count words,
Yet for an understanding ear enough,
And all that my brief stay permits, beside.
Nor must you blame me, as I sought to teach
My elder in command, or threw a doubt
Upon the very skill, it comforts me
To know I leave,—your steady soldiership
That never failed me: yet, because it seemed
A stranger's eye might haply note defect,
Which skill, thro' use and custom, overlooks,
I have gone into the old cares once more,
As if I had to come and save again
Florence—that May—that morning! 'Tis night now—
Well—I broke off with? . . .

Puc.

Of the past campaign

You spoke—of measures to be kept in mind
For future use.

Lur.

True, so . . . but, time—no time!

As well end here: remember this, and me!
Farewell now!

Puc.

Dare I speak?

Lur.

—The south o' the river—

How is the second stream called . . . no,—the third?

Puc. Pesa.

Lur.

And a stone's cast from the fordingplace,
To the East,—the little mount's name?

Puc.

Lupo.

Lur.

Ay

Ay—there the tower, and all that side is safe!
With San Romano, west of Evola,
San Miniato, Scala, Empoli,
Five towers in all,—forget not!

Puc.

Fear not me!

Lur.

—Nor to memorialize the Council now,
I' the easy hour, on those battalions' claim
On the other side, by Staggia on the hills,
That kept the Siennese at check!

Puc.

One word—

Sir, I must speak! That you submit yourself

LURIA

To Florence' bidding, howsoe'er it prove,
And give up the command to me—is much,
Too much, perhaps: but what you tell me now,
Even will affect the other course you choose—
Poor as it may be, peril even that!
Refuge you seek at Pisa—yet these plans
All militate for Florence, all conclude
Your formidable work to make her queen
Of the country,—which her rivals rose against
When you began it,—which to interrupt,
Pisa would buy you off at any price!
You cannot mean to sue for Pisa's help.
With this made perfect and on record?

Lur.

I—

At Pisa, and for refuge, do you say?

Puc. Where are you going, then? You must decide
On leaving us, a silent fugitive,
Alone, at night—you, stealing thro' our lines,
Who were this morning's Luria,—you escape
To painfully begin the world once more,
With such a Past, as it had never been!
Where are you going?

Lur.

Not so far, my Puccio,
But that I hope to hear, and know, and praise
(If you mind praise from your old captain yet)
Each happy blow you strike for Florence!

Puc.

—Ay,

But ere you gain your shelter, what may come?
For see—tho' nothing's surely known as yet,
Still . . . truth must out . . . I apprehend the worst.
If mere suspicion stood for certainty
Before, there's nothing can arrest the steps
Of Florence toward your ruin, once on foot.
Forgive her fifty times, it matters not!
And having disbelieved your innocence,
How can she trust your magnanimity?
You may do harm to her—why then, you will!
And Florence is sagacious in pursuit.
Have you a friend to count on?

Lur.

One sure friend.

LURIA

Puc. Potent?

Lur. All potent.

Puc. And he is apprised?

Lur. He waits me.

Puc. So!—Then I, put in your place,
Making my profit of all done by you,
Calling your labours mine, reaping their fruit,
To these, the State's gift, now add this of yours—
That I may take to my peculiar store
All your instructions to do Florence good;
And if, by putting some few happily
In practice, I should both advantage her
And draw down honour on myself,—what then?

Lur. Do it, my Puccio! I shall know and praise!

Puc. Though, so, men say, "mark what we gain by
change

"—A Puccio for a Luria!"

Lur. Even so!

Puc. Then, not for fifty hundred Florences,
Would I accept one office save my own,
Fill any other than my rightful post
Here at your feet, my Captain and my Lord!
That such a cloud should break, such trouble be,
Ere a man settle soul and body down
Into his true place and take rest for ever!
Here were my wise eyes fixed on your right hand,
And so the bad thoughts came and the worse words,
And all went wrong and painfully enough,—
No wonder,—till, the right spot stumbled on,
All the jar stops, and there is peace at once!
I am yours now,—a tool your right hand wields!
God's love, that I should live, the man I am,
On orders, warrants, patents and the like,
As if there were no glowing eye i' the world,
To glance straight inspiration to my brain,
No glorious heart to give mine twice the beats!
For, see—my doubt, where is it?—Fear? 'tis flown!
And Florence and her anger are a tale
To scare a child! Why, half a dozen words
Will tell her, spoken as I now can speak,

LURIA

Her error, my past folly—and all's right,
And you are Luria, our great chief again!
Or at the worst—which worst were best of all—
To exile or to death I follow you!

Lur. Thanks, Puccio! Let me use the privilege
You grant me: if I still command you,—stay!
Remain here—my vicegerent, it shall be,
And not successor: let me, as of old,
Still serve the State, my spirit prompting yours;
Still triumph, one for both—There! Leave me now!
You cannot disobey my first command?
Remember what I spoke of Jacopo,
And what you promised to observe with him!
Send him to speak with me—nay, no farewell—
You shall be by me when the sentence comes.

[PUCCIO goes.]

So, there's one Florentine returns again!
Out of the genial morning company,
One face is left to take into the night.

Enter JACOPO.

Jac. I wait for your commands, Sir.

Lur. What, so soon?

I thank your ready presence and fair word.
I used to notice you in early days
As of the other species, so to speak,
Those watchers of the lives of us who act—
That weigh our motives, scrutinize our thoughts;
So, I propound this to your faculty
As you would tell me, were a town to take
. . . That is, of old. I am departing hence
Under these imputations: that is nought—
I leave no friend on whom they may rebound,
Hardly a name behind me in the land,
Being a stranger; all the more behoves
That I regard how altered were the case
With natives of the country, Florentines,
On whom the like mischance should fall; the roots
O' the tree survive the ruin of the trunk—
No root of mine will throb—you understand.

LURIA

But I had predecessors, Florentines,
Accused as I am now, and punished so—
The Traversari—you know more than I
How stigmatized they are, and lost in shame.
Now, Puccio, who succeeds me in command,
Both served them and succeeded, in due time
He knows the way, holds proper documents,
And has the power to lay the simple truth
Before an active spirit, as I know yours:
And also there's Tiburzio, my new friend,
Will, at a word, confirm such evidence,
He being the chivalric soul we know.
I put it to your instinct—were't not well,
—A grace, though but for contrast's sake, no more,—
If you who witness, and have borne a share
Involuntarily, in my mischance,
Should, of your proper motion, set your skill
To indicate . . . that is, investigate
The reason or the wrong of what befel
Those famous citizens, your countrymen?
Nay—you shall promise nothing—but reflect,
And if your sense of justice prompt you—good!

Jac. And if, the trial past, their fame stand clear
To all men's eyes, as yours, my lord, to mine—
Their ghosts may sleep in quiet satisfied!
For me, a straw thrown up into the air,
My testimony goes for a straw's worth.
I used to hold by the instructed brain,
And move with Braccio as the master-wind;
The heart leads surelier: I must move with you—
As greatest now, who ever were the best.
So, let the last and humblest of your servants
Accept your charge, as Braccio's heretofore,
And offer homage, by obeying you! [*JACOPO goes.*]

Lur. Another!—Luria goes not poorly forth!
If we could wait! The only fault's with Time:
All men become good creatures—but so slow!

Enter DOMIZIA.

Lur. Ah, you once more?

LURIA

Dom. Domizia, that you knew,
Performed her task, and died with it—'Tis I!
Another woman, you have never known.
Let the Past sleep now.

Lur. I have done with it.

Dom. How inexhaustibly the spirit grows!
One object, she seemed erewhile born to reach
With her whole energies and die content,
So like a wall at the world's end it stood,
With nought beyond to live for,—is it reached?
Already are new undreamed energies
Outgrowing under, and extending further
To a new object;—there's another world!
See! I have told the purpose of my life,—
'Tis gained—you are decided, well or ill—
You march on Florence, or submit to her—
My work is done with you, your brow declares:
But—leave you? More of you seems yet to reach!
I stay for what I just begin to see.

Lur. So that you turn not to the Past!

Dom. You trace
Nothing but ill in it—my selfish impulse,
Which sought its ends and disregarded yours?

Lur. Speak not against your nature: best, each
keep
His own—you, yours—most, now, when I keep mine,
—At least, fall by it, having too weakly stood.
God's finger marks distinctions, all so fine,
We would confound—the Lesser has its use,
Which, when it apes the Greater, is foregone.
I, born a Moor, lived half a Florentine;
But, punished properly, can die a Moor.
Beside, there is what makes me understand
Your nature . . . I have seen it—

Dom. One like mine?

Lur. In my own East . . . if you would stoop and
help

My barbarous illustration . . . it sounds ill—
Yet there's no wrong at bottom—rather, praise—

Dom. Well?

LURIA

Lur. We have creatures there, which if you saw
The first time, you would doubtless marvel at,
For their surpassing beauty, craft and strength.
And tho' it were a lively moment's shock
Wherein you found the purpose of those tongues
That seemed innocuous in their lambent play,
Yet, once made know such grace required such guard,
Your reason soon would acquiesce, I think,
In the Wisdom which made all things for the best;
So take them, good with ill, contentedly—
The prominent beauty with the secret sting.
I am glad to have seen you wondrous Florentines,
Yet

Dom. I am here to listen.

Lur. My own East!
How nearer God we were! He glows above
With scarce an intervention, presses close
And palpitatingly, His soul o'er ours!
We feel Him, nor by painful reason know!
The everlasting minute of creation
Is felt there; *Now* it is, as it was *Then*;
All changes at His instantaneous will,
Not by the operation of a law
Whose maker is elsewhere at other work!
His soul is still engaged upon his world—
Man's praise can forward it, Man's prayer suspend,
For is not God all-mighty?—To recast
The world, erase old things and make them new,
What costs it Him? So, man breathes nobly there!
And inasmuch as Feeling, the East's gift,
Is quick and transient—comes, and lo, is gone—
While Northern Thought is slow and durable,
Oh, what a mission was reserved for me,
Who, born with a perception of the power
And use of the North's thought for us of the East,
Should have stayed there and turned it to account,
Giving Thought's character and permanence
To the too-transitory Feelings there—
Writing God's messages in mortal words!
Instead of which, I leave my fated field

LURIA

For this where such a task is needed least,
Where all are born consummate in the art
I just perceive a chance of making mine,—
And then, deserting thus my early post,
I wonder that the men I come among
Mistake me! There, how all had understood,
Still brought fresh stuff for me to stamp and keep,
Fresh instinct to translate them into law!
Me, who . . .

Dom. Who here the greater task achieve,
More needful even: who have brought fresh stuff
For us to mould, interpret and prove right,—
New feelings fresh from God, which, could we know
O' the instant, where had been our need of them?
—Whose life re-teaches us what life should be,
What faith is, loyalty and simpleness,
All, their revealment taught us so long since
That, having mere tradition of the fact,
Truth copied falteringly from copies faint,
The early traits all dropped away,—we said
On sight of faith of yours, “so looks not faith
“We understand, described and taught before.”
But still, the truth was shown; and tho' at first
It suffer from our haste, yet trace by trace
Old memories reappear, the likeness grows,
Our slow Thought does its work, and all's re-known.
Oh, noble Luria! what you have decreed
I see not, but no animal revenge,
No brute-like punishment of bad by worse—
It cannot be, the gross and vulgar way
Traced for me by convention and mistake,
Has gained that calm approving eye and brow!
Spare Florence after all! Let Luria trust
To his own soul, and I will trust to him!

Lur. In time!

Dom. How, Luria?

Lur. It is midnight now—
And they arrive from Florence with my fate.

Dom. I hear no step . . .

Lur. I feel it, as you say!

LURIA

Enter HUSAIN.

Hus. The man returned from Florence!

Lur. As I knew.

Hus. He seeks thee.

Lur. And I only wait for him.

Aught else?

Hus. A movement of the Lucchese troops
Southward—

Lur. . . . Toward Florence? Have out instantly . . .
Ah, old use clings! Puccio must care henceforth!
In—quick—'tis nearly midnight! Bid him come!

Enter TIBURZIO, BRACCIO, and PUCCIO.

Lur. Tiburzio?—not at Pisa?

Tib. I return
From Florence: I serve Pisa, and must think
By such procedure I have served her best.
A people is but the attempt of many
To rise to the completer life of one—
And those who live as models for the mass
Are singly of more value than they all.
Such man are you, and such a time is this
That your sole fate concerns a nation more
Than its apparent welfare; and to prove
Your rectitude, and duly crown the same,
Imports it far beyond the day's event,
Its battle's loss or gain—the mass remains,
Keep but the model safe, new men will rise
To study it, and other days to prove
How great a good was Luria's having lived.
I might go try my fortune as you bade,
And joining Lucca, helped by your disgrace,
Repair our harm—so were to-day's work done;
But where were Luria for our sons to see?
No, I look farther. I have testified
(Declaring my submission to your arms)
Your full success to Florence, making clear
Your probity, as none else could: I spoke—
And it shone clearly!

LURIA

Lur.

Ah—till Braccio spoke!

Brac. Till Braccio told in just a word the whole—
His old great error, and return to knowledge—
Which told . . . Nay, Luria, *I* should droop the head,
I, whom shame rests with, yet I dare look up,
Sure of your pardon now I sue for it,
Knowing you wholly—so let midnight end!
Sunrise will come next! Still you answer not?
The shadow of the night is past away:
Our circling faces here 'mid which it rose
Are all that felt it,—they close round you now
To witness its completest vanishing.
Speak, Luria! Here begins your true career—
Look up to it!—All now is possible—
The glory and the grandeur of each dream—
And every prophecy shall be fulfilled
Save one . . . (nay, now your word must come at
last)

—That you would punish Florence!

Hus. (*pointing to LURIA'S dead body.*) That is
done!—

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

PART FIRST, BEING WHAT WAS CALLED THE POETRY
OF CHIAPPINO'S LIFE: AND PART SECOND, ITS
PROSE.

PART I

*Inside LUITOLFO'S house at Faenza. CHIAPPINO,
EULALIA.*

Eu. What is it keeps Luitolfo? Night's fast falling,
And 'twas scarce sunset . . . had the Ave-bell
Sounded before he sought the Provost's House?
I think not: all he had to say would take
Few minutes, such a very few, to say!
How do you think, Chiappino? If our lord
The Provost were less friendly to your friend
Than everybody here professes him,
I should begin to tremble—should not you?
Why are you silent when so many times
I turn and speak to you?

Ch.

That's good!

Eu.

You laugh?

Ch. Yes. I had fancied nothing that bears price
In the whole world was left to call my own,
And, may be, felt a little pride thereat:
Up to a single man's or woman's love,
Down to the right in my own flesh and blood,
There's nothing mine, I fancied,—till you spoke!
—Counting, you see, as “nothing” the permission
To study this peculiar lot of mine
In silence: well, go silence with the rest
Of the world's good! What can I say, shall serve?

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

Eu. This,—lest you, even more than needs, embitter
Our parting: say your wrongs have cast, for once,
A cloud across your spirit!

Ch. How a cloud?

Eu. No man nor woman loves you, did you say?

Ch. My God, were't not for thee!

Eu. Ay, God remains,
Even did Men forsake you.

Ch. Oh, not so!

Were't not for God, I mean, what hope of truth—
Speaking truth, hearing truth, would stay with Man?
I, now—the homeless, friendless, penniless,
Proscribed and exiled wretch who speak to you,
Ought to speak truth, yet could not, for my death,
(The thing that tempts me most) help speaking lies
About your friendship, and Luitolfo's courage,
And all our townsfolk's equanimity,—
Through sheer incompetence to rid myself
Of the old miserable lying trick
Caught from the liars I have lived with,—God,
Did I not turn to thee! it is thy prompting
I dare to be ashamed of, and thy counsel
Would die along my coward lip, I know—
But I do turn to thee! This craven tongue,
These features which refuse the soul its way,
Reclaim Thou! Give me truth—truth, power to speak
—And after be sole present to approve
The spoken truth!—or, stay, that spoken truth,
Who knows but you, too, might approve?

Eu. Ah, well—
Keep silence, then, Chiappino!

Ch. You would hear,
And shall now,—why the thing we're pleased to style
My gratitude to you and all your friends
For service done me, is just gratitude
So much as yours was service—and no more.
I was born here, so was Luitolfo,—both
At one time, much with the same circumstance
Of rank and wealth; and both, up to this night
Of parting company, have side by side

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

Still fared, he in the sunshine—I, the shadow:
“Why?” asks the world: “Because,” replies the world
To its complacent self, “these playfellows,
Who took at church the holy-water drop
One from the other’s finger, and so forth,—
Were of two moods: Luitolfo was the proper
Friend-making, everywhere friend-finding soul,
Fit for the sunshine, so it followed him;
A happy-tempered bringer of the best
Out of the worst; who bears with what’s past cure,
And puts so good a face on’t—wisely passive
Where action’s fruitless, while he remedies
In silence what the foolish rail against;
A man to smooth such natures as parade
Of opposition must exasperate—
No general gauntlet-gatherer for the weak
Against the strong, yet over-scrupulous
At lucky junctures; one who won’t forego
The after-battle work of binding wounds,
Because, forsooth, he’d have to bring himself
To side with their inflictors for their leave!”
—Why do you gaze, nor help me to repeat
What comes so glibly from the common mouth,
About Luitolfo and his so-styled friend?

Eu. Because, that friend’s sense is obscured . . .

Ch.

I thought

You would be readier with the other half
Of the world’s story,—my half!—Yet, ’tis true,
For all the world does say it! Say your worst!
True, I thank God, I ever said “you sin,”
When a man did sin: if I could not say it,
I glared it at him,—if I could not glare it,
I prayed against him,—then my part seemed over;
God’s may begin yet—so it will, I trust!

Eu. If the world outraged you, did we?

Ch.

What’s “me”

That you use well or ill? It’s Man, in me,
All your successes are an outrage to,
You all, whom sunshine follows, as you say!
Here’s our Faenza birthplace—they send here

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

A Provost from Ravenna—how he rules,
You can at times be eloquent about—
“Then, end his rule!” ah yes, one stroke does that!
But patience under wrong works slow and sure.
Must violence still bring peace forth? He, beside,
Returns so blandly one's obeisance—ah—
Some latent virtue may be lingering yet,
Some human sympathy which, once excite,
And all the lump were leavened quietly—
So, no more talk of striking, for this time!
But I, as one of those he rules, won't bear
These pretty takings-up and layings down
Our cause, just as you think occasion suits!
Enough of earnest, is there? You'll play, will you?
Diversify your tactics,—give submission,
Obsequiousness and flattery a turn,
While we die in our misery patient deaths?
We all are outraged then, and I the first!
I, for Mankind, resent each shrug and smirk,
Each beck and bend, each . . . all you do and are,
I hate!

Eu. We share a common censure, then!
'Tis well you have not poor Luitolfo's part
Or mine to point out in the wide offence.

Ch. Oh, shall I let you so escape me, Lady?
Come, on your own ground, Lady,—from yourself,
(Leaving the people's wrong, which most is mine,)
What have I got to be so grateful for?
These three last fines, no doubt, one on the other
Paid by Luitolfo?

Eu. Shame, Chiappino!

Ch. Shame

Fall presently on who deserves it most!
Which is to see. He paid my fines—my friend,
Your prosperous smooth husband presently,
Then, scarce your wooer,—now, your lover: well—
I loved you!

Eu. Hold!

Ch. You knew it, years ago;
When my voice faltered and my eyes grew dim

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

Because you gave me your silk mask to hold—
My voice that greatens when there's need to curse
The people's Provost to their heart's content,
—My eyes, the Provost, who bears all men's eyes,
Banishes now because he cannot bear!
You knew . . . but you do your parts—my part, I!
So be it! you flourish—I decay! All's well!

Eu. I hear this for the first time!

Ch. . . . The fault's there?
Then, my days spoke not, and my nights of fire
Were voiceless? Then, the very heart may burst
Yet all prove nought, because no mincing speech
Tells leisurely that thus it is and thus?
Eulalia—truce with toying for this once—
A banished fool, who troubles you to-night
For the last time—Oh, what's to fear from me?
You knew I loved you!

Eu. . . . Not so, on my faith!
You were my now-affianced lover's friend—
Came in, went out with him, could speak as he;
All praise your ready parts and pregnant wit;
See how your words come from you in a crowd!
Luitolfo's first to place you o'er himself
In all that challenges respect and love—
Yet you were silent then, who blame me now!
I say all this by fascination, sure—
I am all but wed to one I love, yet listen—
It must be, you are wronged, and that the wrongs
Luitolfo pities . . .

Ch. . . . —You too pity? Do!
But hear first what my wrongs are; so began
This talk and so shall end this talk. I say,
Was't not enough that I must strive, I saw,
To grow so far familiar with your charms
As to contrive some way to win them—which
To do, an age seemed far too little—for, see!
We all aspire to Heaven—and there is Heaven
Above us—go there! Dare we go? no, surely!
How dare we go without a reverent pause,
A growing less unfit for Heaven?—Even so,

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

I dared not speak—the greater fool, it seems!
Was't not enough to struggle with such folly,
But I must have, beside, the very man
Whose slight, free, loose and incapacious soul
Gave his tongue scope to say whate'er he would
—Must have him load me with his benefits
For fortune's fiercest stroke!

Eu. Justice to him
That's now entreating, at his risk perhaps,
Justice for you! Did he once call those acts
Of simple friendship—bounties, benefits?

Ch. No—the straight course had been to call them so—
Then, I had flung them back, and kept myself
Unhampered, free as he to win the prize
We both sought—but “the gold was dross,” he said,
“He loved me, and I loved him not—to spurn
“A trifle out of superfluity:
“He had forgotten he had done as much!”
So had not I!—Henceforth, try as I could
To take him at his word, there stood by you
My benefactor—who might speak and laugh
And urge his nothings—even banter me
Before you—but my tongue was tied. A dream!
Let's wake: your husband . . . how you shake at that!
Good—my revenge!

Eu. Why should I shake? What forced,
Or forces me to be Luitolfo's bride?

Ch. There's my revenge, that nothing forces you!
No gratitude, no liking of the eye,
Nor longing of the heart, but the poor bond
Of habit—here so many times he came,
So much he spoke,—all these compose the tie
That pulls you from me! Well, he paid my fines,
Nor missed a cloak from wardrobe, dish from table—
—He spoke a good word to the Provost here—
Held me up when my fortunes fell away
—It had not looked so well to let me drop—
Men take pains to preserve a tree-stump, even,
Whose boughs they played beneath—much more a
friend!

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

But one grows tired of seeing, after the first,
Pains spent upon impracticable stuff
Like me: I could not change—you know the rest.
I've spoke my mind too fully out, for once,
This morning to our Provost; so ere night
I leave the city on pain of death—and now
On my account there's gallant intercession
Goes forward—that's so graceful!—and anon
He'll noisily come back: the intercession
Was made and fails—all's over for us both—
'Tis vain contending—I had better go:
And I do go—and so to you he turns
Light of a load, and ease of that permits
His visage to repair its natural bland
Economy, sore broken late to suit
My discontent: so, all are pleased—you, with him,
He with himself, and all of you with me
—Who, say the citizens, had done far better
In letting people sleep upon their woes,
If not possessed with talent to relieve them
When once they woke;—but then I had, they'll say,
Doubtless some unknown compensating pride
In what I did—and as I seem content
With ruining myself, why so should they be,
And so they are, and so be with his prize
The devil, when he gets them speedily!
Why does not your Luitolfo come? I long
To don this cloak and take the Lugo path.
It seems you never loved me, then?

Eu.

Chiappino!

Ch. Never?

Eu.

Never.

Ch.

That's sad—say what I might,
There was no helping being sure this while
You loved me—love like mine must have return,
I thought—no river starts but to some sea!
And had you loved me, I could soon devise
Some specious reason why you stifled love,
Some fancied self-denial on your part,
Which made you choose Luitolfo; so, excepting

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

From the wide condemnation of all here,
One woman! Well, the other dream may break!
If I knew any heart, as mine loved you,
Loved me, tho' in the vilest breast 'twere lodged,
I should, I think, be forced to love again—
Else there's no right nor reason in the world!

Eu. "If you knew," say you,—but I did not know—
That's where you're blind, Chiappino!—a disease
Which if I may remove, I'll not repent
The listening to: you cannot, will not, see
How, place you but in every circumstance
Of us, you are just now indignant at,
You'd be as we.

Ch. I should be? . . . that, again!
I, to my Friend, my Country and my Love,
Be as Luitolfo and these Faentines?

Eu. As we.

Ch. Now, I'll say something to remember!
I trust in Nature for the stable laws
Of Beauty and Utility—Spring shall plant,
And Autumn garner to the end of time:
I trust in God—the Right shall be the Right
And other than the Wrong, while He endures—
I trust in my own soul, that can perceive
The outward and the inward, nature's good
And God's—So—seeing these men and myself,
Having a right to speak, thus do I speak:
I'll not curse . . . God bears with them—well may I—
But I—protest against their claiming me!
I simply say, if that's allowable,
I would not . . . broadly . . . do as they have done—
—God curse this townful of born slaves, bred slaves,
Branded into the blood and bone, slaves! Curse
Whoever loved, above his liberty,
House, land or life! and . . . [*A knocking without.*
. . . Bless my hero-friend,

Luitolfo!

Eu. How he knocks!

Ch. The peril, Lady!

"Chiappino, I have run a risk! My God!

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

"How when I prayed the Provost—(he's my friend)—
 "To grant you a week's respite of his sentence
 "That confiscates your goods, and exiles you,
 "He shrugged his shoulder . . . I say, shrugged it!

Yes,

"And fright of that drove all else from my head.
 "Here's a good purse of *scudi*—off with you!
 "Lest of that shrug come—what God only knows!
 "The *scudi*—friend, they're trash—no thanks, I beg—
 "Take the North gate,—for San Vitale's suburb
 "Whose double taxes you appealed against,
 "In discomposure at your ill-success
 "Is apt to stone you: there, there—only go!
 "Beside, Eulalia here looks sleepily—
 "Shake . . . oh, you hurt me, so you squeeze my
 wrist!"

—Is it not thus you'll speak, adventurous friend?

[*As he opens the door, LUITOLFO rushes in, his
 garments disordered.*]

Eu. Luitolfo! Blood?

Luit.

There's more—and more of it!

Eulalia—take the garment . . . no . . . you, friend!
 You take it and the blood from me—you dare!

Eu. Oh, who has hurt you? where's the wound?

Ch.

"Who," say you?

The man with many a touch of virtue yet!
 The Provost's friend has proved too frank of speech
 And this comes of it. Miserable hound!
 This comes of temporising, as I said!
 Here's fruit of your smooth speeches and fair looks!
 Now see my way! As God lives, I go straight
 To the palace and do justice, once for all!

Luit. What says he?

Ch.

I'll do justice on him!

Luit.

Him?

Ch. The Provost.

Luit.

I've just killed him!

Eu.

Oh, my God!

Luit. My friend, they're on my trace—they'll have
 me—now!

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

They're round him, busy with him: soon they'll find
He's past their help, and then they'll be on me!
Chiappino! save Eulalia . . . I forget . . .

Were you not bound . . . for . . .

Ch. Lugo!

Luit. Ah—yes—yes—

That was the point I prayed of him to change.

Well—go—be happy . . . is Eulalia safe?

They're on me!

Ch. 'Tis through me they reach you, then!

Friend, seem the man you are! Lock arms—that's
right.

Now tell me what you've done; explain how you
That still professed forbearance, still preached peace,
Could bring yourself . . .

Luit. What was peace for, Chiappino?

I tried peace—did that say that when peace failed
Strife should not follow? All my peaceful days
Were just the prelude to a day like this,
I cried "You call me 'friend'—save my true friend!
"Save him, or lose me!"

Ch. But you never said

You meant to tell the Provost thus and thus!

Luit. Why should I say it? What else did I
mean?

Ch. Well? He persisted?

Luit. Would so order it

You should not trouble him too soon again—
I saw a meaning in his eye and lip—
I poured my heart's store of indignant words
Out on him—then—I know not.—He retorted—
And I . . . some staff lay there to hand—I think
He bade his servants thrust me out—I struck—
. . . Ah, they come! Fly you, save yourselves, you
two!

The dead back-weight of the beheading axe!

The glowing trip-hook, thumbscrews and the gadge!

Eu. They do come! Torches in the Place! Fare-
well—

Chiappino! You can work no good to us—

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

Much to yourself; believe not, all the world
Must needs be cursed henceforth!

Ch.

And you?

Eu.

I stay.

Ch. Ha, ha! Now, listen! I am master here!
This was my coarse disguise—this paper shows
My path of flight and place of refuge—see—
Lugo—Argenta—past San Nicolo—
Ferrara, then to Venice and all's safe!
Put on the cloak! His people have to fetch
A compass round about.—There's time enough
Ere they can reach us—so you straightway make
For Lugo . . . Nay, he hears not! On with it—
The cloak, Luitolfo, do you hear me? See—
He obeys he knows not how.—Then, if I must . . .
Answer me! Do you know the Lugo gate?

Eu. The north-west gate, over the bridge!

Luit.

I know!

Ch. Well, there—you are not frightened? All my
route

Is traced in that—at Venice you'll escape
Their power! Eulalia—I am master here!

[*Shouts from without. He pushes out LUITOLFO,
who complies mechanically.*

In time! nay, help me with him—So!—he's gone.

Eu. What have you done? On you, perchance, all
know

The Provost's hater, will men's vengeance fall
As our accomplice . . .

Ch.

Mere accomplice? See!

[*Putting on LUITOLFO's vest.*

Now, Lady, am I true to my profession,
Or one of these?

Eu.

You take Luitolfo's place?

Ch. Die for him!

Eu.

Well done!

[*Shouts increase.*

Ch.

How the people tarry!

I can't be silent . . . I must speak . . . or sing—
How natural to sing now!

Eu.

Hush and pray!

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

We are to die—but even I perceive
'Tis not a very hard thing so to die—
My cousin of the pale-blue tearful eyes,
Poor Cesca, suffers more from one day's life
With the stern husband; Tisbe's heart goes forth
Each evening after that wild son of hers,
To track his thoughtless footstep thro' the streets—
How easy for them both to die like this!
I am not sure that I could live as they.

Ch. Here they come, crowds! They pass the gate?
Yes!—No!—

One torch is in the court-yard. Here flock all!

Eu. At least Luitolfo has escaped!—What cries!

Ch. If they would drag one to the market-place,
One might speak there!

Eu. List, list!

Ch. They mount the steps!

Enter the Populace.

Ch. I killed the Provost!

[*The Populace speaking together.*] 'Twas Chiappino,
friends!

Our saviour.—The best man at last as first!

He who first made us see what chains we wore,

He also strikes the blow that shatters them,

He at last saves us—our best citizen!

—Oh, have you only courage to speak now?

My eldest son was christened a year since

“Cino” to keep Chiappino's name in mind—

Cino, for shortness merely, you observe!

The City's in our hands.—The guards are fled—

Do you, the cause of all, come down—come down—

Come forth to counsel us, our chief, our king,

Whate'er rewards you! Choose your own reward!

The peril over, its reward begins!

Come and harangue us in the market-place!

Eu. Chiappino!

Ch. Yes . . . I understand your eyes!
You think I should have promptlier disowned

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

This deed with its strange unforeseen success
In favour of Luitolfo—but the peril,
So far from ended, hardly seems begun !
To-morrow, rather, when a calm succeeds,
We easily shall make him full amends :
And meantime . . . if we save them as they pray,
And justify the deed by its effects ?

Eu. You would, for worlds, you had denied at once !

Ch. I know my own intention, be assured !
All's well ! Precede us, fellow-citizens !

PART II

The Market-place. LUITOLFO in disguise mingling with the Populace assembled opposite the Provost's Palace.

1st Bystander [To LUIT.] You, a friend of Luitolfo's ! Then, your friend is vanished,—in all probability killed on the night that his patron the tyrannical Provost was loyally suppressed here, exactly a month ago, by our illustrious fellow-citizen, thrice-noble saviour, and new Provost that is like to be, this very morning,—Chiappino !

Luit. He the new Provost ?

2nd. Up those steps will he go, and beneath yonder pillar stand, while Ogniben, the Pope's Legate from Ravenna, reads the new dignitary's title to the people, according to established usage.—For which reason, there is the assemblage you inquire about.

Luit. Chiappino—the old Provost's successor ? Impossible ! But tell me of that presently—What I would know first of all is, wherefore Luitolfo must so necessarily have been killed on that memorable night ?

3rd. You were Luitolfo's friend ? So was I—Never, if you will credit me, did there exist so poor-spirited a milk-sop ! He, with all the opportunities in the world

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

furnished by daily converse with our oppressor, would not stir a finger to help us: so when Chiappino rose in solitary majesty and . . . how does one go on saying? . . . dealt the godlike blow,—this Luitolfo, not unreasonably fearing the indignation of an aroused and liberated people, fled precipitately: he may have got trodden to death in the press at the south-east gate, when the Provost's guards fled thro' it to Ravenna, with their wounded master,—if he did not rather hang himself under some hedge.

Luit. Or why not simply have lain perdue in some quiet corner,—such as San Cassiano, where his estate was,—receiving daily intelligence from some sure friend, meanwhile, as to the turn matters were taking here . . . how, for instance, the Provost was not dead after all, only wounded . . . or, as to-day's news would seem to prove, how Chiappino was not Brutus the Elder, after all, only the new Provost . . . and thus Luitolfo be enabled to watch a favourable opportunity for returning—might it not have been so?

3rd. Why, he may have taken that care of himself, certainly, for he came of a cautious stock.—I'll tell you how his uncle, just such another gingerly treader on tiptoes with finger on lip,—how he met his death in the great plague-year: *dico vobis!* Hearing that the seventeenth house in a certain street was infected, he calculates to pass it in safety by taking plentiful breath, say, when he shall arrive at the eleventh house; then scouring by, holding that breath, till he be got so far on the other side as number twenty-three, and thus elude the danger.—And so did he begin—but, as he arrived at thirteen, we will say,—thinking to improve on his precaution by putting up a little prayer to St. Nepomucene of Prague, this exhausted so much of his lungs' reserve, that at sixteen it was clean spent,—consequently at the fatal seventeen he inhaled with a vigour and persistence enough to suck you any latent venom out of the heart of a stone—Ha, ha!

Luit. [Aside.] (If I had not lent that man the money he wanted last spring, I should fear this bitterness was

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

attributable to me). Luitolfo is dead then, one may conclude!

3rd. Why, he had a house here, and a woman to whom he was affianced; and as they both pass naturally to the new Provost, his friend and heir . . .

Luit. Ah, I suspected you of imposing on me with your pleasantries—I know Chiappino better!

1st. (Our friend has the bile! after all, I do not dislike finding somebody vary a little this general gape of admiration at Chiappino's glorious qualities—.) Pray, how much may you know of what has taken place in Faenza since that memorable night?

Luit. It is most to the purpose, that I know Chiappino to have been by profession a hater of that very office of Provost, you now charge him with proposing to accept.

1st. Sir, I'll tell you. That night was indeed memorable—up we rose, a mass of us, men, women, children—out fled the guards with the body of the tyrant—we were to defy the world: but, next grey morning, "What will Rome say," began everybody—(you know we are governed by Ravenna, which is governed by Rome). And quietly into the town, by the Ravenna road, comes on muleback a portly personage, Ogniben by name, with the quality of Pontifical Legate—trots briskly thro' the streets humming a "*Cur fremuère gentes*," and makes directly for the Provost's Palace—there it faces you—"One Messer Chiappino is your leader? I have known three-and-twenty leaders of revolts!" (laughing gently to himself)—"Give me the help of your arm from my mule to yonder steps under the pillar—So! And now, my revolters and good friends, what do you want? The guards burst into Ravenna last night bearing your wounded Provost—and, having had a little talk with him, I take on myself to come and try appease the disorderliness, before Rome, hearing of it, resort to another method; 'tis I come, and not another, from a certain love I confess to, of composing differences. So, do you understand, you are about to experience this unheard-of tyranny from me,

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

that there shall be no heading nor hanging, no confiscation nor exile,—I insist on your simply pleasing yourselves,—and now, pray, what does please you? To live without any government at all? Or having decided for one, to see its minister murdered by the first of your body that chooses to find himself wronged, or disposed for reverting to first principles and a Justice anterior to all institutions,—and so will you carry matters, that the rest of the world must at length unite and put down such a den of wild beasts? As for vengeance on what has just taken place,—once for all, the wounded man assures me he cannot conjecture who struck him—and this so earnestly, that one may be sure he knows perfectly well what intimate acquaintance could find admission to speak with him so late that evening—I come not for vengeance therefore, but from pure curiosity to hear what you will do next.”—And thus he ran on, easily and volubly, till he seemed to arrive quite naturally at the praise of Law, Order and Paternal Government by somebody from rather a distance: all our citizens were in the snare, and about to be friends with so congenial an adviser; but that Chiappino suddenly stood forth, spoke out indignantly, and set things right again . . .

Luit. Do you see?—I recognise him there!

3rd. Ay, but mark you, at the end of Chiappino's longest period in praise of a pure Republic. “And by whom do I desire such a government should be administered, perhaps, but by one like yourself?”—returns the Legate—thereupon speaking, for a quarter of an hour together, on the natural and only legitimate government by the Best and Wisest—and it should seem there was soon discovered to be no such vast discrepancy at bottom between this and Chiappino's theory, place but each in its proper light—“Oh, are you there?” quoth Chiappino:—“In that, I agree,” returns Chiappino, and so on.

Luit. But did Chiappino cede at once to this?

1st. Why, not altogether at once—for instance, he said that the difference between him and all his

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

fellows was, that they seemed all wishing to be kings in one or another way,—whereas what right, asked he, has any man to wish to be superior to another?—whereat, “Ah Sir,” answers the Legate, “this is the death of me, so often as I expect something is really going to be revealed to us by you clearer-seers, deeper-thinkers—this—that your right-hand (to speak by a figure) should be found taking up the weapon it displayed so ostentatiously, not to destroy any dragon in our path, as was prophesied, but simply to cut off its own fellow left-hand—yourself set about attacking yourself—for see now! Here are you who, I make sure, glory exceedingly in knowing the noble nature of the soul, its divine impulses, and so forth; and with such a knowledge you stand, as it were, armed to encounter the natural doubts and fears as to that same inherent nobility, that are apt to waylay us, the weaker ones, in the road of Life,—and when we look eagerly to see them fall before you, lo, round you wheel, only the left hand gets the blow; one proof of the soul’s nobility destroys simply another proof, quite as good, of the same,—you are found delivering an opinion like this! Why, what is this perpetual yearning to exceed, to subdue, to be better than, and a king over, one’s fellows,—all that you so disclaim,—but the very tendency yourself are most proud of, and under another form, would oppose to it,—only in a lower stage of manifestation? You don’t want to be vulgarly superior to your fellows after their poor fashion—to have me hold solemnly up your gown’s tail, or hand you an express of the last importance from the Pope, with all these bystanders noticing how unconcerned you look the while—but neither does our gaping friend, the burgess yonder, want the other kind of kingship, that consists in understanding better than his fellows this and similar points of human nature, nor to roll under the tongue this sweeter morsel still, the feeling that, thro’ immense philosophy, he does *not* feel, he rather thinks, above you and me!”—And so chatting, they glided off arm in arm.

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

Luit. And the result is . . .

1st. Why, that a month having gone by, the indomitable Chiappino, marrying as he will Luitolfo's love—at all events succeeding to Luitolfo's goods,—becomes the first inhabitant of Faenza, and a proper aspirant to the Provostship—which we assemble here to see conferred on him this morning. The Legate's Guard to clear the way! He will follow presently!

Luit. [*withdrawing a little*]. I understand the drift of Eulalia's communication less than ever—yet she surely said, in so many words, that Chiappino was in urgent danger,—wherefore, disregarding her injunctions to continue in my retreat and wait the result of, what she called, some experiment yet in process—I hastened here without her leave or knowledge—what could I else?—Yet if what they say be true . . . if it were for such a purpose, she and Chiappino kept me away . . . Oh, no, no! I must confront him and her before I believe this of them—and at the word, see!

Enter CHIAPPINO and EULALIA.

Eu. We part here, then? The change in your principles would seem to be complete!

Ch. Now, why refuse to see that in my present course I change no principles, only re-adapt them and more adroitly? I had despaired of what you may call the material instrumentality of Life; of ever being able to rightly operate on mankind thro' such a deranged machinery as the existing modes of government—but now, if I suddenly discover how to inform these perverted institutions with fresh purpose, bring the functionary limbs once more into immediate communication with, and subjection to the soul I am about to bestow on them . . . do you see? Why should one desire to invent, so long as it remains possible to renew and transform? When all further hope of the old organisation shall be extinct, then, I grant you, it will be time to try and create another.

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

Eu. And there being discoverable some hope yet in the hitherto much-abused old system of absolute government by a Provost here, you mean to take your time about endeavouring to realise those visions of a perfect State, we once heard of?

Ch. Say, I would fain realise my conception of a Palace, for instance, and that there is, abstractedly, but a single way of erecting one perfectly; here, in the market-place is my allotted building-ground; here I stand without a stone to lay, or a labourer to help me,—stand, too, during a short day of life, close on which the night comes. On the other hand, circumstances suddenly offer me . . . turn and see it . . . the old Provost's House to experiment upon—ruinous, if you please, wrongly constructed at the beginning, and ready to tumble now—but materials abound, a crowd of workmen offer their services; here, exists yet a Hall of Audience of originally noble proportions, there, a Guest-chamber of symmetrical design enough; and I may restore, enlarge, abolish or unite these to heart's content—ought I not rather make the best of such an opportunity, than continue to gaze disconsolately with folded arms on the flat pavement here, while the sun goes slowly down, never to rise again? But you cannot understand this nor me: it is better we should part as you desire.

Eu. So the love breaks away too!

Ch. No, rather my soul's capacity for love widens—needs more than one object to content it,—and, being better instructed, will not persist in seeing all the component parts of love in what is only a single part,—nor in finding the so many and so various loves, united in the love of a woman,—finding all uses in one instrument, as the savage has his sword, sceptre and idol, all in one club-stick. Love is a very compound thing. I shall give the intellectual part of my love to Men, the mighty dead, or illustrious living; and determine to call a mere sensual instinct by as few fine names as possible. What do I lose?

Eu. Nay, I only think, what do I lose! and, one

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

more word—which shall complete my instruction—does Friendship go too?—What of Luitolfo—the author of your present prosperity?

Ch. How the author?—

Eu. That blow now called yours . . .

Ch. Struck without principle or purpose, as by a blind natural operation—and to which all my thoughts and life directly and advisedly tended. I would have struck it, and could not. He would have done his utmost to avoid striking it, yet did so. I dispute his right to that deed of mine—a final action with him, from the first effect of which he fled away—a mere first step with me, on which I base a whole mighty superstructure of good to follow. Could he get good from it?

Eu. So we profess, so we perform !

Enter OGNIBEN. *EULALIA stands apart.*

Ogni. I have seen three-and-twenty leaders of revolts!—By your leave, Sir! Perform? What does the lady say of Performing?

Ch. Only the trite saying, that we must not trust Profession, only Performance.

Ogni. She'll not say that, Sir, when she knows you longer; you'll instruct her better. Ever judge of men by their professions! For tho' the bright moment of promising is but a moment and cannot be prolonged, yet, if sincere in its moment's extravagant goodness, why, trust it and know the man by it, I say—not by his performance—which is half the world's work, interfere as the world needs must with its accidents and circumstances,—the profession was purely the man's own! I judge people by what they might be,—not are, nor will be.

Ch. But have there not been found, too, performing natures, not merely promising?

Ogni. Plenty: little Bindo of our town, for instance, promised his friend, great ugly Masaccio, once, "I will repay you!"—for a favour done him: so when

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his father came to die, and Bindo succeeded to the inheritance, he sends straightway for Masaccio and shares all with him; gives him half the land, half the money, half the kegs of wine in the cellar. "Good," say you—and it is good: but had little Bindo found himself possessor of all this wealth some five years before—on the happy night when Masaccio procured him that interview in the garden with his pretty cousin Lisa—instead of being the beggar he then was,—I am bound to believe that in the warm moment of promise he would have given away all the wine-kegs, and all the money, and all the land, and only reserved to himself some hut on a hill-top hard by, whence he might spend his life in looking and seeing his friend enjoy himself: he meant fully that much, but the world interfered!—To our business—did I understand you just now within-doors? You are not going to marry your old friend's love, after all?

Ch. I must have a woman that can sympathise with, and appreciate me, I told you.

Ogni. Oh, I remember! you, the greater nature, needs must have a lesser one (—avowedly lesser—contest with you on that score would never do!)—such a nature must comprehend you, as the phrase is, accompany and testify of your greatness from point to point onward: why, that were being not merely as great as yourself, but greater considerably! Mean-while, might not the more bounded nature as reasonably count on your appreciation of it, rather?—on your keeping close by it, so far as you both go together, and then going on by yourself as far as you please? So God serves us!

Ch. And yet a woman that could understand the whole of me, to whom I could reveal alike the strength and the weakness—

Ogni. Ah, my friend, wish for nothing so foolish! Worship your love, give her the best of you to see; be to her like the Western Lands (they bring us such strange news of) to the Spanish Court—send her only your lumps of gold, fans of feathers, your spirit-like

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birds, and fruits and gems—so shall you, what is unseen of you, be supposed altogether a Paradise by her,—as these Western lands by Spain—tho' I warrant there is filth, red baboons, ugly reptiles and squalor enough, which they bring Spain as few samples of as possible. Do you want your mistress to respect your body generally? Offer her your mouth to kiss—don't strip off your boot and put your foot to her lips! You understand my humour by this time? I help men to carry out their own principle: if they please to say two and two make five, I assent, if they will but go on and say, four and four make ten!

Ch. But these are my private affairs—what I desire you to occupy yourself about, is my public appearance presently: for when the people hear that I am appointed Provost, tho' you and I may thoroughly discern—and easily, too—the right principle at bottom of such a movement, and how my republicanism remains thoroughly unaltered, only takes a form of expression hitherto commonly judged . . . and heretofore by myself . . . incompatible with its existence . . . when thus I reconcile myself to an old form of government instead of proposing a new one . . .

Ogni. Why, you must deal with people broadly. Begin at a distance from this matter and say,—new truths, old truths! why, there is nothing new possible to be revealed to us in the moral world—we know all we shall ever know, and it is for simply reminding us, by their various respective expedients, how we *do* know this and the other matter, that men get called prophets, poets and the like. A philosopher's life is spent in discovering that, of the half-dozen truths he knew when a child, such an one is a lie, as the world states it in set terms; and then, after a weary lapse of years, and plenty of hard thinking, it becomes a truth again after all, as he happens to newly consider it and view it in a different relation with the others—and so he restates it, to the confusion of somebody else in good time.—As for adding to the original stock of truths,—impossible!—So you see the expres-

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sion of them is the grand business:—you have got a truth in your head about the right way of governing people, and you took a mode of expressing it—which now you confess to be imperfect—but what then? There is Truth in Falsehood, Falsehood in Truth.—No man ever told one great truth, that I know, without the help of a good dozen of lies at least, generally unconscious ones: and as when a child comes in breathlessly and relates a strange story, you try to conjecture from the very falsities in it, what the reality was,—do not conclude that he saw nothing in the sky, because he assuredly did not see a flying horse there as he says,—so, thro' the contradictory expression, do you see, men should look painfully for, and trust to arrive eventually at, what you call the true principle at bottom. Ah, what an answer is there! to what will it not prove applicable!—"Contradictions?"—Of course there were, say you!

Ch. Still, the world at large may call it inconsistency, and what shall I say in reply?

Ogni. Why look you, when they tax you with tergiversation or duplicity, you may answer—you begin to perceive that, when all's done and said, both great parties in the state, the advocates of change in the present system of things, and the opponents of it, patriot and anti-patriot, are found working together for the common good, and that in the midst of their efforts for and against its progress, the world somehow or other still advances—to which result they contribute in equal proportions, those who spent their life in pushing it onward as those who gave theirs to the business of pulling it back—now, if you found the world stand still between the opposite forces, and were glad, I should conceive you—but it steadily advances, you rejoice to see! By the side of such a rejoicer, the man who only winks as he keeps cunning and quiet, and says, "Let yonder hot-headed fellow fight out my battle; I, for one, shall win in the end by the blows he gives, and which I ought to be giving"—even he seems graceful in his avowal, when

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one considers that he might say, "I shall win quite as much by the blows our antagonist gives him, and from which he saves me—I thank the antagonist equally!" Moreover, you must enlarge on the loss of the edge of party-animosity with age and experience—

Ch. And naturally time must wear off such asperities—the bitterest adversaries get to discover certain points of similarity between each other, common sympathies—do they not?

Ogni. Ay, had the young David but sate first to dine on his cheeses with the Philistine, he had soon discovered an abundance of such common sympathies—He of Gath, it is recorded, was born of a father and mother, had brothers and sisters like another man,—they, no more than the sons of Jesse, were used to eat each other; but, for the sake of one broad antipathy that had existed from the beginning, David slung the stone, cut off the giant's head, made a spoil of it, and after ate his cheeses alone, with the better appetite, for all I can learn. My friend, as you, with a quickened eye-sight, go on discovering much good on the worse side, remember that the same process should proportionably magnify and demonstrate to you the much more good on the better side—and when I profess no sympathy for the Goliaths of our time, and you object that a large nature should sympathise with every form of intelligence, and see the good in it, however limited—I answer, so I do—but preserve the proportions of my sympathy, however finelier or widelier I may extend its action. I desire to be able, with a quickened eye-sight, to descry beauty in corruption where others see foulness only,—but I hope I shall also continue to see a redoubled beauty in the higher forms of matter, where already every body sees no foulness at all. I must retain, too, my old power of selection, and choice of appropriation, to apply to such new gifts . . . else they only dazzle instead of enlightening me. God has his Archangels and consorts with them—tho' he made too, and intimately sees what is good in, the worm. Observe, I speak only as you profess to think and so

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ought to speak—I do justice to your own principles, that is all!

Ch. But you very well know that the two parties do, on occasion, assume each other's characteristics: what more disgusting, for instance, than to see how promptly the newly emancipated slave will adopt, in his own favour, the very measures of precaution, which pressed soreliest on himself as institutions of the tyranny he has just escaped from.—Do the classes, hitherto without opinion, get leave to express it? there is a confederacy immediately, from which—exercise your individual right and dissent, and woe be to you!

Ogni. And a journey over the sea to you!—That is the generous way. Say—emancipated slaves, the first excess, and off I go! The first time a poor devil, who has been bastinadoed steadily his whole life long, finds himself let alone and able to legislate, so begins pettishly, while he rubs his soles, “Woe be to whoever brings anything in the shape of a stick this way,”—you, rather than give up the very innocent pleasure of carrying one to switch flies with,—you, go away to everybody's sorrow! Yet you were quite reconciled to staying at home while the governors used to pass, every now and then, some such edict as “Let no man indulge in owning a stick which is not thick enough to chastise our slaves, if need require.” Well—there are pre-ordained hierarchies among us, and a profane vulgar subjected to a different law altogether—yet I am rather sorry you should see it so clearly—for, do you know what is to . . . all but save you at the Day of Judgment, all you Men of Genius? It is this—that, while you generally began by pulling down God, and went on to the end of your life, in one effort at setting up your own Genius in his place,—still, the last, bitterest concession wrung with the utmost unwillingness from the experience of the very loftiest of you, was invariably—would one think it?—that the rest of mankind, down to the lowest of the mass, stood not, nor ever could stand, just on a level and equality with yourselves.—That will be

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a point in the favour of all such, I hope and believe!

Ch. Why, men of genius are usually charged, I think, with doing just the reverse; and at once acknowledging the natural inequality of mankind, by themselves participating in the universal craving after, and deference to, the civil distinctions which represent it. You wonder they pay such undue respect to titles and badges of superior rank!

Ogni. Not I! (always on your own ground and showing, be it noted!) Who doubts that, with a weapon to brandish, a man is the more formidable? Titles and badges are exercised as such a weapon, to which you and I look up wistfully.—We could pin lions with it moreover, while in its present owner's hands it hardly prods rats. Nay, better than a mere weapon of easy mastery and obvious use, it is a mysterious divining rod that may serve you in undreamed of ways.—Beauty, Strength, Intellect—men often have none of these and yet conceive pretty accurately what kind of advantages they would bestow on the possessor.—You know at least what it is you make up your mind to forego, and so can apply the fittest substitute in your power; wanting Beauty, you cultivate Good Humour, missing Wit, you get Riches; but the mystic unimaginable operation of that gold collar and string of Latin names which suddenly turned poor stupid little peevish Cecco of our town into natural Lord of the best of us—a Duke, he is now! there indeed is a Virtue to be revered!

Ch. Ay, by the vulgar—not by Messere Stiatta the poet, who pays more assiduous court to him than any body.

Ogni. What else should Stiatta pay court to? He has talent, not honour and riches—men naturally covet what they have not.

Ch. No—or Cecco would covet talent, which he has not, whereas he covets more riches, of which he has plenty already.

Ogni. Because a purse added to a purse makes the holder twice as rich—but just such another talent as

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Stiatta's, added to what he now possesses, what would that profit him? Give the talent a purse indeed, to do something with! But lo, how we keep the good people waiting. I only desired to do justice to the noble sentiments which animate you, and which you are too modest to duly enforce. Come, to our main business: shall we ascend the steps? I am going to propose you for Provost to the people; they know your antecedents, and will accept you with a joyful unanimity: whereon I confirm their choice. Rouse up! you are nerving yourself to an effort? Beware the disaster of Messere Stiatta we were talking of—who determining to keep an equal mind and constant face on whatever might be the fortune of his last new poem with our townsmen,—heard too plainly “hiss, hiss, hiss,” increase every moment, till at last the man fell senseless—not perceiving that the portentous sounds had all the while been issuing from between his own nobly clenched teeth, and nostrils narrowed by resolve!

Ch. Do you begin to throw off the mask? to jest with me, having got me effectually into your trap?

Ogni. Where is the trap, my friend? You hear what I engage to do, for my part—you, for yours, have only to fulfil your promise made just now within doors, of professing unlimited obedience to Rome's authority in my person—and I shall authorise no more than the simple re-establishment of the Provostship and the conferment of its privileges upon yourself—the only novel stipulation being a birth of the peculiar circumstances of the time.

Ch. And that stipulation?

Ogni. Oh, the obvious one—that in the event of the discovery of the actual assailant of the late Provost . . .

Ch. Ha!

Ogni. Why, he shall suffer the proper penalty, of course; what did you expect?

Ch. Who heard of this?

Ogni. Rather, who needed to hear of this?

Ch. Can it be, the popular rumour never reached you . . .

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Ogni. Many more such rumours reach me, friend, than I choose to receive: those which wait longest have best chance—has the present one sufficiently waited? Now is its time for entry with effect. See the good people crowding about yonder palace-steps—which we may not have to ascend after all!—my good friends—(nay, two or three of you will answer every purpose)—who was it fell upon and proved nearly the death of your late Provost?—his successor desires to hear, that his day of inauguration may be graced by the act of prompt, bare justice we all anticipate? Who dealt the blow that night, does anybody know?

Luitolfo. [*coming forward.*] I!

All. Luitolfo!

Luit. I avow the deed, justify and approve it, and stand forth now, to relieve my friend of an unearned responsibility.—Having taken thought, I am grown stronger—I shall shrink from nothing that awaits me. Nay, Chiappino—we are friends still—I dare say there is some proof of your superior nature in this starting aside, strange as it seems at first. So, they tell me, my horse is of the right stock, because a shadow in the path frightens him into a frenzy, makes him dash my brains out. I understand only the dull mule's way of standing stockishly, plodding soberly, suffering on occasion a blow or two with due patience.

Eu. I was determined to justify my choice, Chiappino; to let Luitolfo's nature vindicate itself. Henceforth we are undivided, whatever be our fortune.

Ogni. Now, in these last ten minutes of silence, what have I been doing, deem you? Putting the finishing stroke to a homily of mine, I have long taken thought to perfect, on the text "Let whoso thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." To your house, Luitolfo!—Still silent, my patriotic friend? Well, that is a good sign, however! And you will go aside for a time? That is better still. I understand—it would be easy for you to die of remorse here on the spot, and shock us all, but you will live and grow worthy of coming back to us one day. There, I will

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tell every body; and you only do right to believe you will get better as you get older! All men do so,—they are worst in childhood, improve in manhood, and get ready in old age for another world. Youth, with its Beauty and Grace, would seem bestowed on us for some such reason as to make us partly endurable till we have time for really becoming so of ourselves, without their aid, when they leave us. The sweetest child we all smile on for his pleasant want of the whole world to break up, or suck in his mouth, seeing no other good in it—would be rudely handled by that world's inhabitants, if he retained those angelic infantine desires when he has grown six feet high, black and bearded: but, little by little, he sees fit to forego claim after claim on the world, puts up with a less and less share of its good as his proper portion,—and when the octogenarian asks barely a sup of gruel and a fire of dry sticks, and thanks you as for his full allowance and right in the common good of life,—hoping nobody may murder him,—he who began by asking and expecting the whole of us to bow down in worship to him,—why, I say he is advanced, far onward, very far, nearly out of sight like our friend Chiappino yonder! And now—(Ay, good bye to you! He turns round the North-west gate—going to Lugo again? Good bye!)—And now give thanks to God, the keys of the Provost's Palace to me, and yourselves to profitable meditation at home. I have known *Four*-and-twenty leaders of revolts!—

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

A POEM

CHRISTMAS-EVE

AND

EASTER-DAY

CHRISTMAS-EVE

I.

OUT of the little chapel I burst
Into the fresh night air again.
I had waited a good five minutes first
In the doorway, to escape the rain
That drove in gusts down the common's centre,
At the edge of which the chapel stands,
Before I plucked up heart to enter:
Heaven knows how many sorts of hands
Reached past me, groping for the latch
Of the inner door that hung on catch,
More obstinate the more they fumbled,
Till, giving way at last with a scold
Of the crazy hinge, in squeezed or tumbled
One sheep more to the rest in fold,
And left me irresolute, standing sentry
In the sheepfold's lath-and-plaster entry,
Four feet long by two feet wide,
Partitioned off from the vast inside—
I blocked up half of it at least.
No remedy; the rain kept driving:
They eyed me much as some wild beast,
The congregation, still arriving,
Some of them by the mainroad, white
A long way past me into the night,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Skirting the common, then diverging;
Not a few suddenly emerging
From the common's self thro' the paling-gaps,—
—They house in the gravel-pits perhaps,
Where the road stops short with its safeguard border
Of lamps, as tired of such disorder;—
But the most turned in yet more abruptly
From a certain squalid knot of alleys,
Where the town's bad blood once slept corruptly,
Which now the little chapel rallies
And leads into day again,—its priestliness
Lending itself to hide their beastliness
So cleverly (thanks in part to the mason),
And putting so cheery a whitewashed face on
Those neophytes too much in lack of it,
That, where you cross the common as I did,
And meet the party thus presided,
“Mount Zion,” with Love-lane at the back of it,
They front you as little disconcerted,
As, bound for the hills, her fate averted
And her wicked people made to mind him,
Lot might have marched with Gomorrah behind him.

II.

Well, from the road, the lanes or the common,
In came the flock: the fat weary woman,
Panting and bewildered, down-clapping
Her umbrella with a mighty report,
Grounded it by me, wry and flapping,
A wreck of whalebones; then, with a snort,
Like a startled horse, at the interloper
Who humbly knew himself improper,
But could not shrink up small enough,
Round to the door, and in,—the gruff
Hinge's invariable scold
Making your very blood run cold.
Prompt in the wake of her, up-pattered
On broken clogs, the many-tattered
Little old-faced, peaking sister-turned-mother
Of the sickly babe she tried to smother

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Somehow up, with its spotted face,
From the cold, on her breast, the one warm place;
She too must stop, wring the poor suds dry
Of a draggled shawl, and add thereby
Her tribute to the door-mat, sopping
Already from my own clothes' dropping,
Which yet she seemed to grudge I should stand on;
Then stooping down to take off her pattens,
She bore them defiantly, in each hand one,
Planted together before her breast
And its babe, as good as a lance in rest.
Close on her heels, the dingy satins
Of a female something, past me flitted,
With lips as much too white, as a streak
Lay far too red on each hollow cheek;
And it seemed the very door-hinge pitied
All that was left of a woman once,
Holding at least its tongue for the nonce.
Then a tall yellow man, like the Penitent Thief,
With his jaw bound up in a handkerchief,
And eyelids screwed together tight,
Led himself in by some inner light.
And, except from him, from each that entered,
I had the same interrogation—
"What, you, the alien, you have ventured
"To take with us, elect, your station?
"A carer for none of it, a Gallio?"—
Thus, plain as print, I read the glance
At a common prey, in each countenance,
As of huntsman giving his hounds the tallyho:
And, when the door's cry drowned their wonder,
The draught, it always sent in shutting,
Made the flame of the single tallow candle
In the cracked square lanthorn I stood under,
Shoot its blue lip at me, rebutting,
As it were, the luckless cause of scandal:
I verily thought the zealous light
(In the chapel's secret, too!) for spite,
Would shudder itself clean off the wick,
With the airs of a St. John's Candlestick.

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

There was no standing it much longer.
"Good folks," said I, as resolve grew stronger,
"This way you perform the Grand-Inquisitor,
"When the weather sends you a chance visitor?
"You are the men, and wisdom shall die with you,
"And none of the old Seven Churches vie with you!
"But still, despite the pretty perfection
"To which you carry your trick of exclusiveness,
"And, taking God's word under wise protection,
"Correct its tendency to diffusiveness,
"Bidding one reach it over hot ploughshares,—
"Still, as I say, though you've found salvation,
"If I should choose to cry—as now—'Shares!'—
"See if the best of you bars me my ration!
"Because I prefer for my expounder
"Of the laws of the feast, the feast's own Founder:
"Mine's the same right with your poorest and sickliest,
"Supposing I don the marriage-vestment;
"So, shut your mouth, and open your Testament,
"And carve me my portion at your quickest!"
Accordingly, as a shoemaker's lad
With wizened face in want of soap,
And wet apron wound round his waist like a rope,
After stopping outside, for his cough was bad,
To get the fit over, poor gentle creature,
And so avoid disturbing the preacher,
Passed in, I sent my elbow spikewise
At the shutting door, and entered likewise,—
Received the hinge's accustomed greeting,
Crossed the threshold's magic pentacle,
And found myself in full conventicle,
—To wit, in Zion Chapel Meeting,
On the Christmas-Eve of 'Forty-nine,
Which, calling its flock to their special clover,
Found them assembled and one sheep over,
Whose lot, as the weather pleased, was mine.

III.

I very soon had enough of it.
The hot smell and the human noises,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

And my neighbour's coat, the greasy cuff of it,
Were a pebble-stone that a child's hand poises,
Compared with the pig-of-lead-like pressure
Of the preaching-man's immense stupidity,
As he poured his doctrine forth, full measure,
To meet his audience's avidity.
You needed not the wit of the Sybil
To guess the cause of it all, in a twinkling—
No sooner had our friend an inkling
Of treasure hid in the Holy Bible,
(Whenever it was the thought first struck him
How Death, at unawares, might duck him
Deeper than the grave, and quench
The gin-shop's light in Hell's grim drench)
Than he handled it so, in fine irreverence,
As to hug the Book of books to pieces:
And, a patchwork of chapters and texts in severance,
Not improved by the private dog's-ears and creases,
Having clothed his own soul with, he'd fain see equipt
yours,—

So tossed you again your Holy Scriptures.
And you picked them up, in a sense, no doubt:
Nay, had but a single face of my neighbours
Appeared to suspect that the preacher's labours
Were help which the world could be saved without,
'Tis odds but I had borne in quiet
A qualm or two at my spiritual diet;
Or, who can tell? had even mustered
Somewhat to urge in behalf of the sermon:
But the flock sate on, divinely flustered,
Sniffing, methought, its dew of Hermon
With such content in every snuffle,
As the devil inside us loves to ruffle.
My old fat woman purred with pleasure,
And thumb round thumb went twirling faster
While she, to his periods keeping measure,
Maternally devoured the pastor.
The man with the handkerchief, untied it,
Showed us a horrible wen inside it,
Gave his eyelids yet another screwing,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

And rocked himself as the woman was doing.
The shoemaker's lad, discreetly choking,
Kept down his cough. 'Twas too provoking !
My gorge rose at the nonsense and stuff of it,
And saying, like Eve when she plucked the apple,
"I wanted a taste, and now there's enough of it,"
I flung out of the little chapel.

IV.

There was a lull in the rain, a lull
In the wind too ; the moon was risen,
And would have shone out pure and full,
But for the ramparted cloud-prison,
Block on block built up in the west,
For what purpose the wind knows best,
Who changes his mind continually.
And the empty other half of the sky
Seemed in its silence as if it knew
What, any moment, might look through
A chance-gap in that fortress massy :—
Through its fissures you got hints
Of the flying moon, by the shifting tints,
Now, a dull lion-colour, now, brassy
Burning to yellow, and whitest yellow,
Like furnace-smoke just ere the flames bellow,
All a-simmer with intense strain
To let her through,—then blank again,
At the hope of her appearance failing.
Just by the chapel, a break in the railing
Shows a narrow path directly across ;
'Tis ever dry walking there, on the moss—
Besides, you go gently all the way uphill :
I stooped under and soon felt better :
My head grew light, my limbs more supple,
As I walked on, glad to have slipt the fetter ;
My mind was full of the scene I had left,
That placid flock, that pastor vociferant,
How this outside was pure and different !
The sermon, now—what a mingled weft
Of good and ill ! were either less,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Its fellow had coloured the whole distinctly;
But alas for the excellent earnestness,
And the truths, quite true if stated succinctly,
But as surely false, in their quaint presentiment,
However to pastor and flock's contentment!
Say rather, such truths looked false to your eyes,
With his provings and parallels twisted and twined,
Till how could you know them, grown double their
size,

In the natural fog of the good man's mind?
Like yonder spots of our roadside lamps,
Haloed about with the common's damps.
Truth remains true, the fault's in the prover;
The zeal was good, and the aspiration;
And yet, and yet, yet, fifty times over,
Pharaoh received no demonstration
By his Baker's dream of Baskets Three,
Of the doctrine of the Trinity,—
Although, as our preacher thus embellished it,
Apparently his hearers relished it
With so unfeigned a gust—who knows if
They did not prefer our friend to Joseph?
But so it is everywhere, one way with all of them!
These people have really felt, no doubt,
A something, the motion they style the Oath of them;
And this is their method of bringing about,
By a mechanism of words and tones,
(So many texts in so many groans)
A sort of reviving or reproducing,
More or less perfectly, (who can tell?—)
Of the mood itself, that strengthens by using;
And how it happens, I understand well.
A tune was born in my head last week,
Out of the thump-thump and shriek-shriek
Of the train, as I came by it, up from Manchester;
And when, next week, I take it back again,
My head will sing to the engine's clack again,
While it only makes my neighbour's haunches stir,
—Finding no dormant musical sprout
In him, as in me, to be jolted out.

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

'Tis the taught already that profit by teaching;
He gets no more from the railway's preaching,
Than, from this preacher who does the rail's office, I.
Whom therefore the flock casts a jealous eye on.
Still, why paint over their door "Mount Zion,"
To which all flesh shall come, saith the prophecy?

V.

But wherefore be harsh on a single case?
After how many modes, this Christmas-Eve,
Does the selfsame weary thing take place?
The same endeavour to make you believe,
And much with the same effect, no more:
Each method abundantly convincing,
As I say, to those convinced before,
But scarce to be swallowed without wincing,
By the not-as-yet-convinced. For me,
I have my own church equally.
And in *this* church my faith sprang first!
(I said, as I reached the rising ground,
And the wind began again, with a burst
Of rain in my face, and a glad rebound
From the heart beneath, as if, God speeding me,
I entered His church-door, Nature leading me)
—In youth I looked to these very skies,
And probing their immensities,
I found God there, His visible power;
Yet felt in my heart, amid all its sense
Of that power, an equal evidence
That His love, there too, was the nobler dower.
For the loving worm within its clod,
Were diviner than a loveless god
Amid his worlds, I will dare to say.
You know what I mean: God's all, man's nought:
But also, God, whose pleasure brought
Man into being, stands away
As it were, an handbreadth off, to give
Room for the newly-made to live,
And look at Him from a place of apart,
And use His gifts of brain and heart,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Given, indeed, but to keep for ever.
Who speaks of man, then, must not sever
Man's very elements from man,
Saying, "But all is God's"—whose plan
Was to create man and then leave him
Able, His own word saith, to grieve Him,
But able to glorify Him too,
As a mere machine could never do,
That prayed or praised, all unaware
Of its fitness for aught but praise and prayer,
Made perfect as a thing of course.
Man, therefore, stands on his own stock
Of love and power as a pin-point rock,
And, looking to God who ordained divorce
Of the rock from His boundless continent,
Sees in His Power made evident,
Only excess by a million fold
O'er the power God gave man in the mould.
For, see : Man's hand, first formed to carry
A few pounds' weight, when taught to marry
Its strength with an engine's, lifts a mountain,
—Advancing in power by one degree ;
And why count steps through eternity ?
But Love is the ever springing fountain :
Man may enlarge or narrow his bed
For the water's play, but the water head—
How can he multiply or reduce it ?
As easy create it, as cause it to cease :
He may profit by it, or abuse it ;
But 'tis not a thing to bear increase
As power will : be love less or more
In the heart of man, he keeps it shut
Or opes it wide as he pleases, but
Love's sum remains what it was before.
So, gazing up, in my youth, at love
As seen through power, ever above
All modes which make it manifest,
My soul brought all to a single test—
That He, the Eternal First and Last,
Who, in His power, had so surpassed

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

All man conceives of what is might,—
Whose wisdom, too, showed infinite,
—Would prove as infinitely good;
Would never, my soul understood,
With power to work all love desires,
Bestow e'en less than man requires :
That He who endlessly was teaching,
Above my spirit's utmost reaching,
What love can do in the leaf or stone,
(So that to master this alone,
This done in the stone or leaf for me,
I must go on learning endlessly)
Would never need that I, in turn,
Should point him out a defect unheeded,
And show that God had yet to learn
What the meanest human creature needed,—
—Not life, to wit, for a few short years,
Tracking His way through doubts and fears,
While the stupid earth on which I stay
Suffers no change, but passive adds
Its myriad years to myriads,
Though I, He gave it to, decay,
Seeing death come and choose about me,
And my dearest ones depart without me.
No! love which, on earth, amid all the shows of it,
Has ever been seen the sole good of life in it,
The love, ever growing there, spite of the strife in it,
Shall arise, made perfect, from death's repose of it!
And I shall behold Thee, face to face,
O God, and in Thy light retrace
How in all I loved here, still wast Thou!
Whom pressing to, then, as I fain would now,
I shall find as able to satiate
The love, Thy gift, as my spirit's wonder
Thou art able to quicken and sublimate,
Was this sky of Thine, that I now walk under,
And glory in Thee as thus I gaze,
—Thus, thus! oh, let men keep their ways
Of seeking Thee in a narrow shrine—
Be this my way! And this is mine!

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

VI.

For lo, what think you? suddenly
The rain and the wind ceased, and the sky
Received at once the full fruition
Of the moon's consummate apparition.
The black cloud-barricade was riven,
Ruined beneath her feet, and driven
Deep in the west; while, bare and breathless,
North and south and east lay ready
For a glorious Thing, that, dauntless, deathless,
Sprang across them, and stood steady.
'Twas a moon-rainbow, vast and perfect,
From heaven to heaven extending, perfect
As the mother-moon's self, full in face.
It rose, distinctly at the base
With its seven proper colours chorded,
Which still, in the rising, were compressed,
Until at last they coalesced,
And supreme the spectral creature lorded
In a triumph of whitest white,—
Above which intervened the night.
But above night too, like the next,
The second of a wondrous sequence,
Reaching in rare and rarer frequency,
Till the heaven of heavens be circumflect,
Another rainbow rose, a mightier,
Fainter, flushier, and flightier,—
Rapture dying along its verge!
Oh, whose foot shall I see emerge,
WHOSE, from the straining topmost dark,
On to the keystone of that arc?

VII.

This sight was shown me, there and then,—
Me, one out of a world of men,
Singled forth, as the chance might hap
To another, if in a thunderclap
Where I heard noise, and you saw flame,
Some one man knew God called his name.
For me, I think I said, "Appear!

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

"Good were it to be ever here.
"If Thou wilt, let me build to Thee
"Service-tabernacles Three,
"Where, for ever in Thy presence,
"In extatic acquiescence,
"Far alike from thriftless learning
"And ignorance's undiscerning,
"I may worship and remain!"

Thus, at the show above me, gazing
With upturned eyes, I felt my brain
Glutted with the glory, blazing
Throughout its whole mass, over and under,
Until at length it burst asunder,
And out of it bodily there streamed
The too-much glory, as it seemed,
Passing from out me to the ground,
Then palely serpentining round
Into the dark with mazy error.

VIII.

All at once I looked up with terror.
He was there.
He Himself with His human air,
On the narrow pathway, just before:
I saw the back of Him, no more—
He had left the chapel, then, as I.
I forgot all about the sky.
No face: only the sight
Of a sweepy Garment, vast and white,
With a hem that I could recognise.
I felt terror, no surprise:
My mind filled with the cataract,
At one bound, of the mighty fact.
I remembered, He did say
Doubtless, that, to this world's end,
Where two or three should meet and pray,
He would be in the midst, their Friend:
Certainly He was there with them.
And my pulses leaped for joy
Of the golden thought without alloy,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

That I saw His very Vesture's hem.
Then rushed the blood back, cold and clear
With a fresh enhancing shiver of fear,
And I hastened, cried out while I pressed
To the salvation of the Vest,
"But not so, Lord! It cannot be
"That Thou, indeed, art leaving me—
"Me, that have despised Thy friends.
"Did my heart make no amends?
"Thou art the Love of God—above
"His Power, didst hear me place His Love,
"And that was leaving the world for Thee!
"Therefore Thou must not turn from me
"As if I had chosen the other part.
"Folly and pride o'ercame my heart.
"Our best is bad, nor bears Thy test;
"Still it should be our very best.
"I thought it best that Thou, the Spirit,
"Be worshipped in spirit and in truth,
"And in beauty, as even we require it—
"Not in the forms burlesque, uncouth,
"I left but now, as scarcely fitted
"For Thee: I knew not what I pitied:
"But, all I felt there, right or wrong,
"What is it to Thee, who curest sinning?
"Am I not weak as Thou art strong?
"I have looked to Thee from the beginning,
"Straight up to Thee through all the world
"Which, like an idle scroll, lay furled
"To nothingness on either side:
"And since the time Thou wast descried,
"Spite of the weak heart, so have I
"Lived ever, and so fain would die,
"Living and dying, Thee before!
"But if Thou leavest me—"

IX.

Less or more,

I suppose that I spoke thus.

When,—have mercy, Lord, on us!

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

The whole Face turned upon me full.
And I spread myself beneath it,
As when the bleacher spreads, to seethe it
In the cleansing sun, his wool,—
Steeps in the flood of noontide whiteness
Some defiled, discoloured web—
So lay I, saturate with brightness.
And when the flood appeared to ebb,
Lo, I was walking, light and swift,
With my senses settling fast and steadying,
But my body caught up in the whirl and drift
Of the Vesture's amplitude, still eddying
On, just before me, still to be followed,
As it carried me after with its motion :
What shall I say ?—as a path were hollowed
And a man went weltering through the ocean,
Sucked along in the flying wake
Of the luminous water-snake.
Darkness and cold were cloven, as through
I passed, upborne yet walking too.
And I turned to myself at intervals,—
“ So He said, and so it befalls.
“ God who registers the cup
“ Of mere cold water, for His sake
“ To a disciple rendered up,
“ Disdains not His own thirst to slake
“ At the poorest love was ever offered :
“ And because it was my heart I proffered,
“ With true love trembling at the brim,
“ He suffers me to follow Him
“ For ever, my own way,—dispensed
“ From seeking to be influenced
“ By all the less immediate ways
“ That earth, in worships manifold,
“ Adopts to reach, by prayer and praise,
“ The Garment's hem, which, lo, I hold ! ”

x.

And so we crossed the world and stopped.
For where am I, in city or plain,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Since I am 'ware of the world again?
And what is this that rises propped
With pillars of prodigious girth?
Is it really on the earth,
This miraculous Dome of God?
Has the angel's measuring-rod
Which numbered cubits, gem from gem,
'Twixt the gates of the New Jerusalem,
Meted it out,—and what he meted,
Have the sons of men completed?
—Binding, ever as he bade,
Columns in this colonnade
With arms wide open to embrace
The entry of the human race
To the breast of . . . what is it, yon building,
Ablaze in front, all paint and gilding,
With marble for brick, and stones of price
For garniture of the edifice?
Now I see: it is no dream:
It stands there and it does not seem;
For ever, in pictures, thus it looks,
And thus I have read of it in books,
Often in England, leagues away,
And wondered how those fountains play,
Growing up eternally
Each to a musical water-tree,
Whose blossoms drop, a glittering boon,
Before my eyes, in the light of the moon,
To the granite lavers underneath.
Liar and dreamer in your teeth!
I, the sinner that speak to you,
Was in Rome this night, and stood, and knew
Both this and more! For see, for see,
The dark is rent, mine eye is free
To pierce the crust of the outer wall,
And I view inside, and all there, all,
As the swarming hollow of a hive,
The whole Basilica alive!
Men in the chancel, body, and nave,
Men on the pillars' architrave,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Men on the statues, men on the tombs
With popes and kings in their porphyry wombs,
All famishing in expectation
Of the main-altar's consummation.
For see, for see, the rapturous moment
Approaches, and earth's best endowment
Blends with heaven's: the taper-fires
Pant up, the winding brazen spires
Heave loftier yet the baldachin;
The incense-gaspings, long kept in,
Suspire in clouds; the organ blatant
Holds his breath and grovels latent,
As if God's hushing finger grazed him,
(Like Behemoth when He praised him)
At the silver bell's shrill tinkling,
Quick cold drops of terror sprinkling
On the sudden pavement strewed
With faces of the multitude.
Earth breaks up, time drops away,
In flows heaven, with its new day
Of endless life, when He who trod,
Very Man and very God,
This earth in weakness, shame and pain,
Dying the death whose signs remain
Up yonder on the accursed tree,—
Shall come again, no more to be
Of captivity the thrall,
But the one God, all in all,
King of kings, and Lord of lords,
As His servant John received the words,
“I died, and live for evermore!”

XI.

Yet I was left outside the door.
Why sate I there on the threshold-stone,
Left till He returns, alone
Save for the Garment's extreme fold
Abandoned still to bless my hold?—
My reason, to my doubt, replied,
As if a book were opened wide,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

And at a certain page I traced
Every record undefaced,
Added by successive years,—
The harvestings of truth's stray ears
Singly gleaned, and in one sheaf
Bound together for belief.
Yes, I said—that He will go
And sit with these in turn, I know.
Their faith's heart beats, though her head swims
Too giddily to guide her limbs,
Disabled by their palsy-stroke
From propping me. Though Rome's gross yoke
Drops off, no more to be endured,
Her teaching is not so obscured
By errors and perversities,
That no truth shines athwart the lies:
And He, whose eye detects a spark
Even where, to man's, the whole seems dark,
May well see flame where each beholder
Acknowledges the embers smoulder.
But I, a mere man, fear to quit
The clue God gave me as most fit
To guide my footsteps through life's maze,
Because Himself discerns all ways
Open to reach Him: I, a man
He gave to mark where faith began
To swerve aside, till from its summit
Judgment drops her damning plummet,
Pronouncing such a fatal space
Departed from the Founder's base:
He will not bid me enter too,
But rather sit, as now I do,
Awaiting His return outside.
—'Twas thus my reason straight replied,
And joyously I turned, and pressed
The Garment's skirt upon my breast,
Until, afresh its light suffusing me,
My heart cried,—what has been abusing me
That I should wait here lonely and coldly,
Instead of rising, entering boldly,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Baring truth's face, and letting drift
Her veils of lies as they choose to shift?
Do these men praise Him? I will raise
My voice up to their point of praise!
I see the error; but above
The scope of error, see the love.—
Oh, love of those first Christian days!
—Fanned so soon into a blaze,
From the spark preserved by the trampled sect,
That the antique sovereign Intellect
Which then sate ruling in the world,
Like a change in dreams, was hurled
From the throne he reigned upon:
—You looked up, and he was gone!
Gone, his glory of the pen!
—Love, with Greece and Rome in ken,
Bade her scribes abhor the trick
Of poetry and rhetoric,
And exult, with hearts set free,
In blessed imbecility
Scrawled, perchance, on some torn sheet,
Leaving Livy incomplete.
Gone, his pride of sculptor, painter!
—Love, while able to acquaint her
With the thousand statues yet
Fresh from chisel, pictures wet
From brush, she saw on every side,
Chose rather with an infant's pride
To frame those portents which impart
Such unction to true Christian Art.
Gone, Music too! The air was stirred
By happy wings: Terpander's bird
(That, when the cold came, fled away)
Would tarry not the wintry day,—
As more-enduring sculpture must,
Till a filthy saint rebuked the gust
With which he chanced to get a sight
Of some dear naked Aphrodite
He glanced a thought above the toes of,
By breaking zealously her nose off.

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Love, surely, from that music's lingering,
Might have filched her organ-fingering,
Nor chose rather to set prayings
To hog-grunts, praises to horse-neighings.
Love was the startling thing, the new;
Love was the all-sufficient too;
And seeing that, you see the rest.
As a babe can find its mother's breast
As well in darkness as in light,
Love shut our eyes, and all seemed right.
True, the world's eyes are open now:
—Less need for me to disallow
Some few that keep Love's zone unbuckled,
Peevish as ever to be suckled,
Lulled by the same old baby-prattle
With intermixture of the rattle,
When she would have them creep, stand steady,
Upon their feet, or walk already,
Not to speak of trying to climb.
I will be wise another time,
And not desire a wall between us,
When next I see a church-roof cover
So many species of one genus,
All with foreheads bearing *Lover*
Written above the earnest eyes of them;
All with breasts that beat for beauty,
Whether sublimed, to the surprise of them,
In noble daring, steadfast duty,
The heroic in passion, or in action,—
Or, lowered for the senses' satisfaction,
To the mere outside of human creatures,
Mere perfect form and faultless features.
What! with all Rome here, whence to levy
Such contributions to their appetite,
With women and men in a gorgeous bevy,
They take, as it were, a padlock, and clap it tight
On their southern eyes, restrained from feeding
On the glories of their ancient reading,
On the beauties of their modern singing,
On the wonders of the builder's bringing,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

On the majesties of Art around them,—
And, all these loves, late struggling incessant,
When faith has at last united and bound them,
They offer up to God for a present!
Why, I will, on the whole, be rather proud of it,—
And, only taking the act in reference
To the other recipients who might have allowed of it,
I will rejoice that God had the preference!

XII.

So I summed up my new resolves:
Too much love there can never be.
And where the intellect devolves
Its function on love exclusively,
I, as one who possesses both,
Will accept the provision, nothing loth,
—Will feast my love, then depart elsewhere,
That my intellect may find its share.
And ponder, O soul, the while thou departest,
And see thou applaud the great heart of the artist,
Who, examining the capabilities
Of the block of marble he has to fashion
Into a type of thought or passion,—
Not always, using obvious facilities,
Shapes it, as any artist can,
Into a perfect symmetrical man,
Complete from head to foot of the life-size,
Such as old Adam stood in his wife's eyes,—
But, now and then, bravely aspires to consummate
A Colossus by no means so easy to come at,
And uses the whole of his block for the bust,
Leaving the minds of the public to finish it,
Since cut it ruefully short he must:
On the face alone he expends his devotion;
He rather would mar than resolve to diminish it,
—Saying, "Applaud me for this grand notion
"Of what a face may be! As for completing it
"In breast and body and limbs, do *that*, you!"
All hail! I fancy how, happily meeting it,
A trunk and legs would perfect the statue,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Could man carve so as to answer volition.
And how much nobler than petty cavils,
A hope to find, in my spirit-travels,
Some artist of another ambition,
Who having a block to carve, no bigger,
Has spent his power on the opposite quest,
And believed to begin at the feet was best—
For so may I see, ere I die, the whole figure!

XIII.

No sooner said than out in the night!
And still as we swept through storm and night,
My heart beat lighter and more light:
And lo, as before, I was walking swift,
With my senses settling fast and steadying,
But my body caught up in the whirl and drift
Of the Vesture's amplitude, still eddying
On just before me, still to be followed,
As it carried me after with its motion,
—What shall I say?—as a path were hollowed,
And a man went weltering through the ocean,
Sucked along in the flying wake
Of the luminous water-snake.

XIV.

Alone! I am left alone once more—
(Save for the Garment's extreme fold
Abandoned still to bless my hold)
Alone, beside the entrance-door
Of a sort of temple,—perhaps a college,
—Like nothing I ever saw before
At home in England, to my knowledge.
The tall, old, quaint, irregular town!
It may be . . . though *which*, I can't affirm . . . any
Of the famous middle-age towns of Germany;
And this flight of stairs where I sit down,
Is it Halle, Weimar, Cassel, or Frankfort,
Or Göttingen, that I have to thank for't?
It may be Göttingen,—most likely.
Through the open door I catch obliquely

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Glimpses of a lecture-hall;
And not a bad assembly neither—
Ranged decent and symmetrical
On benches, waiting what's to see there;
Which, holding still by the Vesture's hem,
I also resolve to see with them,
Cautious this time how I suffer to slip
The chance of joining in fellowship
With any that call themselves His friends,
As these folks do, I have a notion.
But hist—a buzzing and emotion!
All settle themselves, the while ascends
By the creaking rail to the lecture-desk,
Step by step, deliberate
Because of his cranium's over-freight,
Three parts sublime to one grotesque,
If I have proved an accurate guesser,
The hawk-nosed, high-cheek-boned Professor.
I felt at once as if there ran
A shoot of love from my heart to the man—
That sallow, virgin-minded, studious
Martyr to mild enthusiasm,
As he uttered a kind of cough-preludious
That woke my sympathetic spasm,
(Beside some spitting that made me sorry)
And stood, surveying his auditory
With a wan pure look, well nigh celestial,—
—Those blue eyes had survived so much!
While, under the foot they could not smutch,
Lay all the fleshly and the bestial.
Over he bowed, and arranged his notes,
Till the auditory's clearing of throats
Was done with, died into silence;
And, when each glance was upward sent,
Each bearded mouth composed intent,
And a pin might be heard drop half a mile hence,—
He pushed back higher his spectacles,
Let the eyes stream out like lamps from cells,
And giving his head of hair a hake
Of undressed tow, for colour and quantity—

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

One rapid and impatient shake,
(As our own young England adjusts a jaunty tie
When about to impart, on mature digestion,
Some thrilling view of the surplice-question)
—The Professor's grave voice, sweet though hoarse,
Broke into his Christmas-Eve's discourse.

XV.

And he began it by observing
How reason dictated that men
Should rectify the natural swerving,
By a reversion, now and then,
To the well-heads of knowledge, few
And far away, whence rolling grew
The life-stream wide whereat we drink,
Commingled, as we needs must think,
With waters alien to the source:
To do which, aimed this Eve's discourse.
Since, where could be a fitter time
For tracing backward to its prime,
This Christianity, this lake,
This reservoir, whereat we slake,
From one or other bank, our thirst?
So he proposed inquiring first
Into the various sources whence
This Myth of Christ is derivable;
Demanding from the evidence,
(Since plainly no such life was liveable)
How these phenomena should class?
Whether 'twere best opine Christ was,
Or never was at all, or whether
He was and was not, both together—
It matters little for the name,
So the Idea be left the same:
Only, for practical purpose' sake,
'Twas obviously as well to take
The popular story,—understanding
How the ineptitude of the time,
And the penman's prejudice, expanding
Fact into fable fit for the clime,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Had, by slow and sure degrees, translated it
into this myth, this Individuum,—
Which, when reason had strained and abated it
of foreign matter, gave, for residuum,
A Man!—a right true man, however,
Whose work was worthy a man's endeavour!
Work, that gave warrant almost sufficient
to his disciples, for rather believing
He was just omnipotent and omniscient,
As it gives to us, for as frankly receiving
His word, their tradition,—which, though it meant
something entirely different
from all that those who only heard it,
In their simplicity thought and averred it,
Had yet a meaning quite as respectable:
For, among other doctrines delectable,
Was he not surely the first to insist on,
The natural sovereignty of our race?—
Here the lecturer came to a pausing-place.
And while his cough, like a drouthy piston,
Tried to dislodge the husk that grew to him,
He seized the occasion of bidding adieu to him,
The Vesture still within my hand.

XVI.

could interpret its command.
This time He would not bid me enter
The exhausted air-bell of the Critic.
Truth's atmosphere may grow mephitic
When Papist struggles with Dissenter,
Impregnating its pristine clarity,
One, by his daily fare's vulgarity,
His gust of broken meat and garlic;
One, by his soul's too-much presuming,
To turn the frankincense's fuming
And vapours of the candle starlike
Into the cloud her wings she buoys on:
And each, that sets the pure air seething,
Poisoning it for healthy breathing—
But the Critic leaves no air to poison;

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Pumps out by a ruthless ingenuity
Atom by atom, and leaves you—vacuity.
Thus much of Christ, does he reject?
And what retain? His intellect?
What is it I must reverence duly?
Poor intellect for worship, truly,
Which tells me simply what was told
(If mere morality, bereft
Of the God in Christ, be all that's left)
Elsewhere by voices manifold;
With this advantage, that the stater
Made nowise the important stumble
Of adding, he, the sage and humble,
Was also one with the Creator.
You urge Christ's followers' simplicity:
But how does shifting blame, evade it?
Have wisdom's words no more felicity?
The stumbling-block, His speech—who laid it?
How comes it that for one found able,
To sift the truth of it from fable,
Millions believe it to the letter?
Christ's goodness, then—does that fare better?
Strange goodness, which upon the score
Of being goodness, the mere due
Of man to fellow-man, much more
To God,—should take another view
Of its possessor's privilege,
And bid him rule his race! You pledge
Your fealty to such rule? What, all—
From Heavenly John and Attic Paul,
And that brave weather-battered Peter
Whose stout faith only stood completer
For buffets, sinning to be pardoned,
As the more his hands hauled nets, they hardened,—
All, down to you, the man of men,
Professing here at Göttingen,
Compose Christ's flock! So, you and I
Are sheep of a good man! and why?
The goodness,—how did he acquire it?
Was it self-gained, did God inspire it?

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Choose which ; then tell me, on what ground
Should its possessor dare propound
His claim to rise o'er us an inch?
Were goodness all some man's invention,
Who arbitrarily made mention
What we should follow, and where flinch,—
What qualities might take the style
Of right and wrong,—and had such guessing
Met with as general acquiescing
As graced the Alphabet erewhile,
When A got leave an Ox to be,
No Camel (quoth the Jews) like G,—
For thus inventing thing and title
Worship were that man's fit requital.
But if the common conscience must
Be ultimately judge, adjust
Its apt name to each quality
Already known,—I would decree
Worship for such mere demonstration
And simple work of nomenclature,
Only the day I praised, not Nature,
But Harvey, for the circulation.
I would praise such a Christ, with pride
And joy, that he, as none beside,
Had taught us how to keep the mind
God gave him, as God gave his kind,
Freer than they from fleshly taint!
I would call such a Christ our Saint,
As I declare our Poet, him
Whose insight makes all others dim:
A thousand poets pried at life,
And only one amid the strife
Rose to be Shakespeare! Each shall take
His crown, I'd say, for the world's sake—
Though some objected—"Had we seen
'The heart and head of each, what screen
'Was broken there to give them light,
'While in ourselves it shuts the sight,
'We should no more admire, perchance,
'That these found truth out at a glance,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

"Than marvel how the bat discerns
"Some pitch-dark cavern's fifty turns,
"Led by a finer tact, a gift
"He boasts, which other birds must shift.
"Without, and grope as best they can."
No, freely I would praise the man,—
Nor one whit more, if he contended
That gift of his, from God, descended.
Ah, friend, what gift of man's does not?
No nearer Something, by a jot,
Rise an infinity of Nothings
Than one: take Euclid for your teacher:
Distinguish kinds: do crownings, clothings,
Make that Creator which was creature?
Multiply gifts upon his head,
And what, when all's done, shall be said
But . . . the more gifted he, I ween!
That one's made Christ, another, Pilate,
And This might be all That has been,—
So what is there to frown or smile at?
What is left for us, save, in growth,
Of soul, to rise up, far past both,
From the gift looking to the Giver,
And from the cistern to the River,
And from the finite to Infinity,
And from man's dust to God's divinity?

XVII.

Take all in a word: the Truth in God's breast
Lies trace for trace upon ours impressed:
Though He is so bright and we so dim,
We are made in His image to witness Him;
And were no eye in us to tell,
Instructed by no inner sense,
The light of Heaven from the dark of Hell,
That light would want its evidence,—
Though Justice, Good and Truth were still
Divine, if, by some demon's will,
Hatred and wrong had been proclaimed
Law through the worlds, and Right misnamed.

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

No mere exposition of morality
Made or in part or in totality,
Should win you to give it worship, therefore :
And, if no better proof you will care for,
—Whom do you count the worst man upon earth ?
Be sure, he knows, in his conscience, more
Of what Right is, than arrives at birth
In the best man's acts that we bow before :
This last *knows* better—true ; but my fact is,
'Tis one thing to know, and another to practise ;
And thence I conclude that the real God-function
Is to furnish a motive and injunction
For practising what we know already.
And such an injunction and such a motive
As the God in Christ, do you waive, and “ heady
High minded,” hang your tablet-votive
Outside the fane on a finger-post ?
Morality to the uttermost,
Supreme in Christ as we all confess,
Why need *we* prove would avail no jot
To make Him God, if God He were not ?
What is the point where Himself lays stress ?
Does the precept run “ Believe in Good,
“ In Justice, Truth, now understood
“ For the first time ? ”—or, “ Believe in ME,
“ Who lived and died, yet essentially
“ Am Lord of Life ? ” Whoever can take
The same to his heart and for mere love's sake
Conceive of the love,—that man obtains
A new truth ; no conviction gains
Of an old one only, made intense
By a fresh appeal to his faded sense.

XVIII.

Can it be that He stays inside ?
Is the Vesture left me to commune with ?
Could my soul find aught to sing in tune with
Even at this lecture, if she tried ?
Oh, let me at lowest sympathise
With the lurking drop of blood that lies

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

In the desiccated brain's white roots
Without a throb for Christ's attributes,
As the Lecturer makes his special boast !
If love's dead there, it has left a ghost.
Admire we, how from heart to brain
(Though to say so strike the doctors dumb)
One instinct rises and falls again,
Restoring the equilibrium.
And how when the Critic had done his best,
And the Pearl of Price, at reason's test,
Lay dust and ashes levigable
On the Professor's lecture-table ;
When we looked for the inference and monition
That our faith, reduced to such a condition,
Be swept forthwith to its natural dust-hole,—
He bids us, when we least expect it,
Take back our faith,—if it be not just whole,
Yet a pearl indeed, as his tests affect it,
Which fact pays the damage done rewardingly,
So, prize we our dust and ashes accordingly !
“Go home and venerate the Myth
“I thus have experimented with—
“This Man, continue to adore him
“Rather than all who went before him,
“And all who ever followed after!”—
Surely for this I may praise you, my brother !
Will you take the praise in tears or laughter?
That's one point gained: can I compass another?
Unlearned love was safe from spurning—
Can't we respect your loveless learning?
Let us at least give Learning honour !
What laurels had we showered upon her,
Girding her loins up to perturb
Our theory of the Middle Verb ;
Or Turklike brandishing a scimeter
O'er anapæsts in comic-trimeter ;
Or curing the halt and maimed Iketides,
While we lounged on at our indebted ease :
Instead of which, a tricky demon
Sets her at Titus or Philemon !

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

When Ignorance wags his ears of leather
And hates God's word, 'tis altogether;
Nor leaves he his congenial thistles
To go and browse on Paul's Epistles.
—And you, the audience, who might ravage
The world wide, enviably savage
Nor heed the cry of the retriever,
More than Herr Heine (before his fever),—
I do not tell a lie so arrant
As say my passion's wings are furled up,
And, without the plainest Heavenly warrant,
I were ready and glad to give this world up—
But still, when you rub the brow meticulous,
And ponder the profit of turning holy
If not for God's, for your own sake solely,
—God forbid I should find you ridiculous!
Deduce from this lecture all that eases you,
Nay, call yourselves, if the calling pleases you,
“Christians,”—abhor the Deist's pravity,—
Go on, you shall no more move my gravity,
Than, when I see boys ride a-cockhorse
I find it in my heart to embarrass them
By hinting that their stick's a mock horse,
And they really carry what they say carries them.

XIX.

So sate I talking with my mind.
I did not long to leave the door
And find a new church, as before,
But rather was quiet and inclined
To prolong and enjoy the gentle resting
From further tracking and trying and testing.
This tolerance is a genial mood!
(Said I, and a little pause ensued).
One trims the bark 'twixt shoal and shelf,
And sees, each side, the good effects of it,
A value for religion's self,
A carelessness about the sects of it.
Let me enjoy my own conviction,
Not watch my neighbour's faith with fretfulness,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Still spying there some dereliction
Of truth, perversity, forgetfulness!
Better a mild indifferentism,
To teach that all our faiths (though duller
His shines through a dull spirit's prism)
Originally had one colour—
Sending me on a pilgrimage
Through ancient and through modern times
To many peoples, various climes,
Where I may see Saint, Savage, Sage
Fuse their respective creeds in one
Before the general Father's throne!

XX.

. . . 'Twas the horrible storm began afresh!
The black night caught me in his mesh
Whirled me up, and flung me prone.
I was left on the college-step alone.
I looked, and far there, ever fleeting
Far, far away, the receding gesture,
And looming of the lessening Vesture,
Swept forward from my stupid hand,
While I watched my foolish heart expand
In the lazy glow of benevolence,
O'er the various modes of man's belief.
I sprang up with fear's vehemence.
—Needs must there be one way, our chief
Best way of worship: let me strive
To find it, and when found, contrive
My fellows also take their share.
This constitutes my earthly care:
God's is above it and distinct!
For I, a man, with men am linked,
And not a brute with brutes; no gain
That I experience, must remain
Unshared: but should my best endeavour
To share it, fail—subsisteth ever
God's care above, and I exult
That God, by God's own ways occult,
May—doth, I will believe—bring back

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

All wanderers to a single track !
Meantime, I can but testify
God's care for me—no more, can I—
It is but for myself I *know*.
The world rolls witnessing around me
Only to leave me as it found me ;
Men cry there, but my ear is slow.
Their races flourish or decay
—What boots it, while yon lucid way
Loaded with stars, divides the vault ?
How soon my soul repairs its fault
When, sharpening senses' hebetude,
She turns on my own life ! So viewed,
No mere mote's-breadth but teems immense
With witnessings of providence :
And woe to me if when I look
Upon that record, the sole book
Unsealed to me, I take no heed
Of any warning that I read !
Have I been sure, this Christmas-Eve,
God's own hand did the rainbow weave,
Whereby the truth from heaven slid
Into my soul ?—I cannot bid
The world admit He stooped to heal
My soul, as if in a thunder-peal
Where one heard noise, and one saw flame,
I only knew He named my name.
And what is the world to me, for sorrow
Or joy in its censures, when to-morrow
It drops the remark, with just-turned head
Then, on again—That man is dead ?
Yes,—but for me—my name called,—drawn
As a conscript's lot from the lap's black yawn,
He has dipt into on a battle-dawn :
Bid out of life by a nod, a glance,—
Stumbling, mute-mazed, at nature's chance,—
With a rapid finger circled round,
Fixed to the first poor inch of ground,
To fight from, where his foot was found ;
Whose ear but a minute since lay free

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

To the wide camp's buzz and gossipry—
Summoned, a solitary man,
To end his life where his life began,
From the safe glad rear, to the dreadful van!
Soul of mine, hadst thou caught and held
By the hem of the Vesture . . .

XXI.

And I caught
At the flying Robe, and unrepelled
Was lapped again in its folds full-fraught
With warmth and wonder and delight,
God's mercy being infinite.
And scarce had the words escaped my tongue,
When, at a passionate bound, I sprang
Out of the wandering world of rain,
Into the little chapel again.

XXII.

How else was I found there, bolt upright
On my bench, as if I had never left it?
—Never flung out on the common at night
Nor met the storm and wedge-like cleft it,
Seen the raree-show of Peter's successor,
Or the laboratory of the Professor!
For the Vision, *that* was true, I wist,
True as that heaven and earth exist.
There sate my friend, the yellow and tall,
With his neck and its wen in the selfsame place;
Yet my nearest neighbour's cheek showed gall,
She had slid away a contemptuous space:
And the old fat woman, late so placable,
Eyed me with symptoms, hardly mistakeable,
Of her milk of kindness turning rancid:
In short a spectator might have fancied
That I had nodded betrayed by a slumber,
Yet kept my seat, a warning ghastly,
Through the heads of the sermon, nine in number,
To wake up now at the tenth and lastly.
But again, could such a disgrace have happened?

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Each friend at my elbow had surely nudged it ;
And, as for the sermon, where did my nap end ?
Unless I heard it, could I have judged it ?
Could I report as I do at the close,
First, the preacher speaks through his nose ;
Second, his gesture is too emphatic ;
Thirdly, to waive what's pedagogic,
The subject-matter itself lacks logic :
Fourthly, the English is ungrammatic.
Great news ! the preacher is found no Pascal,
Whom, if I pleased, I might to the task call
Of making square to a finite eye
The circle of infinity,
And find so all-but-just-succeeding !
Great news ! the sermon proves no reading
Where bee-like in the flowers I may bury me,
Like Taylor's, the immortal Jeremy !
And now that I know the very worst of him,
What was it I thought to obtain at first of him ?
Ha ! Is God mocked, as He asks ?
Shall I take on me to change His tasks,
And dare, despatched to a river-head
For a simple draught of the element,
Neglect the thing for which He sent,
And return with another thing instead ?—
Saying . . . " Because the water found
" Welling up from underground,
" Is mingled with the taints of earth,
" While Thou, I know, dost laugh at dearth,
" And couldest, at a word, convulse
" The world with the leap of its river-pulse,—
" Therefore I turned from the oozeings muddy.
" And bring thee a chalice I found, instead :
" See the brave veins in the breccia ruddy !
" One would suppose that the marble bled.
" What matters the water ? A hope I have nursed,
" That the waterless cup will quench my thirst."
— Better have knelt at the poorest stream
That trickles in pain from the straitest rift !
For the less or the more is all God's gift,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Who blocks up or breaks wide the granite-seam.
And here, is there water or not, to drink?
I, then, in ignorance and weakness,
Taking God's help, have attained to think
My heart does best to receive in meekness
This mode of worship, as most to His mind,
Where earthly aids being cast behind,
His All in All appears serene,
With the thinnest human veil between,
Letting the mystic Lamps, the Seven,
The many motions of His spirit,
Pass, as they list, to earth from Heaven.
For the preacher's merit or demerit,
It were to be wished the flaws were fewer
In the earthen vessel, holding treasure,
Which lies as safe in a golden ewer;
But the main thing is, does it hold good measure?
Heaven soon sets right all other matters!—
Ask, else, these ruins of humanity,
This flesh worn out to rags and tatters,
This soul at struggle with insanity,
Who thence take comfort, can I doubt,
Which an empire gained, were a loss without.
May it be mine! And let us hope
That no worse blessing befall the Pope,
Turn'd sick at last of the day's bulfoonery,
Of his posturings and his petticoatings,
Beside the Bourbon bully's gloatings
In the bloody orgies of drunk poltroonery!
Nor may the Professor forego its peace
At Göttingen, presently, when, in the dusk
Of his life, if his cough, as I fear, should increase,
Prophesied of by that horrible husk;
And when, thicker and thicker, the darkness fills
The world through his misty spectacles,
And he gropes for something more substantial
Than a fable, myth, or personification,
May Christ do for him, what no mere man shall.
And stand confessed as the God of salvation!
Meantime, in the still recurring fear

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Test myself, at unawares, be found,
While attacking the choice of my neighbours round,
Without my own made—I choose here!
The giving out of the hymn reclaims me;
I have done!—And if any blames me,
Thinking that merely to touch in brevity
The topics I dwell on, were unlawful,—
Or, worse, that I trench, with undue levity,
On the bounds of the Holy and the awful,
I praise the heart, and pity the head of him,
And refer myself to THEE, instead of him;
Who head and heart alike discernest,
Looking below light speech we utter,
When the frothy spume and frequent sputter
Prove that the soul's depths boil in earnest!
May the truth shine out, stand ever before us!
I put up pencil and join chorus
To Hepzibah Tune, without further apology,
The last five verses of the third section
Of the seventeenth hymn in Whitfield's Collection,
To conclude with the doxology.

EASTER-DAY

I.

How very hard it is to be
A Christian! Hard for you and me,
—Not the mere task of making real
That duty up to its ideal,
Effecting thus, complete and whole,
A purpose of the human soul—
For that is always hard to do;
But hard, I mean, for me and you
To realise it, more or less,
With even the moderate success
Which commonly repays our strife
To carry out the aims of life.
“This aim is greater,” you may say,
“And so more arduous every way.”

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

—But the importance of the fruits
Still proves to man, in all pursuits,
Proportional encouragement.

“Then, what if it be God’s intent

“That labour to this one result

“Shall seem unduly difficult?”

—Ah, that’s a question in the dark—

And the sole thing that I remark

Upon the difficulty, this;

We do not see it where it is,

At the beginning of the race:

As we proceed, it shifts its place,

And where we looked for palms to fall,

We find the tug’s to come,—that’s all.

II.

At first you say, “The whole, or chief

“Of difficulties, is Belief.

“Could I believe once thoroughly,

“The rest were simple. What? Am I

“An idiot, do you think? A beast?

“Prove to me only that the least

“Command of God is God’s indeed,

“And what injunction shall I need

“To pay obedience? Death so nigh

“When time must end, eternity

“Begin,—and cannot I compute?

“Weigh loss and gain together? suit

“My actions to the balance drawn,

“And give my body to be sawn

“Asunder, hacked in pieces, tied

“To horses, stoned, burned, crucified,

“Like any martyr of the list?

“How gladly,—if I made acquist,

“Through the brief minutes’ fierce annoy,

“Of God’s eternity of joy.”

III.

—And certainly you name the point

Whereon all turns: for could you joint

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

This flexile finite life once tight
Into the fixed and infinite,
You, safe inside, would spurn what's out,
With carelessness enough, no doubt—
Would spurn mere life: but where time brings
To their next stage your reasonings,
Your eyes, late wide, begin to wink
Nor see the path so well, I think.

IV.

You say, "Faith may be, one agrees,
"A touchstone for God's purposes,
"Even as ourselves conceive of them.
"Could He acquit us or condemn
"For holding what no hand can loose,
"Rejecting when we can't but choose?
"As well award the victor's wreath
"To whosoever should take breath
"Duly each minute while he lived—
"Grant Heaven, because a man contrived
"To see the sunlight every day
"He walked forth on the public way.
"You must mix some uncertainty
"With faith, if you would have faith *be*.
"Why, what but faith, do we abhor
"And idolize each other for—
"—Faith in our evil, or our good,
"Which is or is not understood
"Aright by those we love or those
"We hate, thence called our friends or foes?
"Your mistress saw your spirit's grace,
"When, turning from the ugly face,
"I found belief in it too hard;
"And both of us have our reward.
"—Yet here a doubt peeps: well for us
"Weak beings, to go using thus
"A touchstone for our little ends,
"And try with faith the foes and friends;
"—But God, bethink you! I would fain
"Conceive of the Creator's reign

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

"As based upon exacter laws
"Than creatures build by with applause.
"In all God's acts—(as Plato cries
"He doth)—He *should* geometrise.
"Whence, I desiderate . . ."

V.

I see!

You would grow smoothly as a tree,
Soar heavenward, straightly up like fire—
God bless you—there's your world entire
Needing no faith, if you think fit;
Go there, walk up and down in it!
The whole creation travails, groans—
Contrive your music from its moans,
Without or let or hindrance, friend!
That's an old story, and its end
As old—you come back (be sincere)
With every question you put here
(Here where there once was, and is still,
We think, a living oracle,
Whose answers you stood carping at)
This time flung back unanswered flat,—
Besides, perhaps, as many more
As those that drove you out before,
Now added, where was little need!
Questions impossible, indeed,
'To us who sate still, all and each
Persuaded that our earth had speech
Of God's, writ down, no matter if
In cursive type or hieroglyph,—
Which one fact frees us from the yoke
Of guessing why He never spoke.
You come back in no better plight
Than when you left us,—am I right?

VI.

So the old process, I conclude,
Goes on, the reasoning's pursued
Further. You own, "'Tis well averred,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

"A scientific faith's absurd,
"—Frustrates the very end 'twas meant
"To serve: so I would rest content
"With a mere probability,
"But, probable; the chance must lie
"Clear on one side,—lie all in rough,
"So long as there is just enough
"To pin my faith to, though it hap
"Only at points: from gap to gap
"One hangs up a huge curtain so,
"Grandly, nor seeks to have it go
"Foldless and flat along the wall:
"—What care I that some interval
"Of life less plainly might depend
"On God? I'd hang there to the end;
"And thus I should not find it hard
"To be a Christian and debarred
"From trailing on the earth, till furled
"Away by death!—Renounce the world?
"Were that a mighty hardship? Plan
"A pleasant life, and straight some man
"Beside you, with, if he thought fit,
"Abundant means to compass it,
"Shall turn deliberate aside
"To try and live as, if you tried
"You clearly might, yet most despise.
"One friend of mine wears out his eyes,
"Slighting the stupid joys of sense,
"In patient hope that, ten years hence,
"Somewhat completer he may see
"His list of *lepidopteræ*:
"While just the other who most laughs
"At him, above all epitaphs
"Aspires to have his tomb describe
"Himself as Sole among the tribe
"Of snuffbox-fanciers, who possessed
"A Grignon with the Regent's crest.
"So that, subduing as you want,
"Whatever stands predominant
"Among my earthly appetites

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

"For tastes, and smells, and sounds, and sights,
"I shall be doing that alone,
"To gain a palm-branch and a throne,
"Which fifty people undertake
"To do, and gladly, for the sake
"Of giving a Semitic guess,
"Or playing pawns at blindfold chess."

VII.

Good! and the next thing is,—look round
For evidence enough. 'Tis found,
No doubt: as is your sort of mind,
So is your sort of search—you'll find
What you desire, and that's to be
A Christian: what says History?
How comforting a point it were
To find some mummy-scrap declare
There lived a Moses! Better still,
Prove Jonah's whale translatable
Into some quicksand of the seas,
Isle, cavern, rock, or what you please,
That Faith might clap her wings and crow
From such an eminence! Or, no—
The Human Heart's best; you prefer
Making that prove the minister
To truth; you probe its wants and needs
And hopes and fears, then try what creeds
Meet these most aptly,—resolute
That Faith plucks such substantial fruit
Wherever these two correspond,
She little needs to look beyond,
To puzzle out what Orpheus was,
Or Dionysius Zagrias.
You'll find sufficient, as I say,
To satisfy you either way.
You wanted to believe; your pains
Are crowned—you do: and what remains?
Renounce the world!—Ah, were it done
By merely cutting one by one
Your limbs off, with your wise head last,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

How easy were it!—how soon past,
If once in the believing mood!
Such is man's usual gratitude,
Such thanks to God do we return,
For not exacting that we spurn
A single gift of life, forego
One real gain,—only taste them so
With gravity and temperance,
That those mild virtues may enhance
Such pleasures, rather than abstract—
Last spice of which, will be the fact
Of love discerned in every gift;
While, when the scene of life shall shift,
And the gay heart be taught to ache,
As sorrows and privations take
The place of joy,—the thing that seems
Mere misery, under human schemes,
Becomes, regarded by the light
Of Love, as very near, or quite
As good a gift as joy before.
So plain is it that all the more
God's dispensation's merciful,
More pettishly we try and cull
Briars, thistles, from our private plot,
To mar God's ground where thorns are not!

VIII.

Do you say this, or I?—Oh, you!
Then, what, my friend,—(so I pursue
Our parley)—you indeed opine
That the Eternal and Divine
Did, eighteen centuries ago,
In very truth . . . Enough! you know
The all-stupendous tale,—that Birth,
That Life, that Death! And all, the earth
Shuddered at,—all, the heavens grew black
Rather than see; all, Nature's rack
And throe at dissolution's brink
Attested,—it took place, you think,
Only to give our joys a zest,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

And prove our sorrows for the best?
We differ, then! Were I, still pale
And heartstruck at the dreadful tale,
Waiting to hear God's voice declare
What horror followed for my share,
As implicated in the deed,
Apart from other sins,—concede
That if He blacked out in a blot
My brief life's pleasantness, 'twere not
So very disproportionate!
Or there might be another fate—
I certainly could understand
(If fancies were the thing in hand)
How God might save, at that Day's price,
The impure in their impurities,
Leave formal licence and complete
To choose the fair, and pick the sweet.
But there be certain words, broad, plain,
Uttered again and yet again,
Hard to mistake, to overgloss—
Announcing this world's gain for loss,
And bidding us reject the same:
The whole world lieth (they proclaim)
In wickedness,—come out of it!—
Turn a deaf ear, if you think fit,
But I who thrill through every nerve
At thought of what deaf ears deserve,—
How do you counsel in the case?

IX.

“I'd take, by all means, in your place,
“The safe side, since it so appears:
“Deny myself, a few brief years,
“The natural pleasure, leave the fruit
“Or cut the plant up by the root.
“Remember what a martyr said
“On the rude tablet overhead—
“‘I was born sickly, poor and mean,
“‘A slave: no misery could screen
“‘The holders of the pearl of price

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

“‘From Cæsar’s envy; therefore twice
“‘I fought with beasts, and three times saw
“‘My children suffer by his law—
“‘At last my own release was earned:
“‘I was some time in being burned,
“‘But at the close a Hand came through
“‘The fire above my head, and drew
“‘My soul to Christ, whom now I see.
“‘Sergius, a brother, writes for me
“‘This testimony on the wall—
“‘For me, I have forgot it all.’
“‘You say right; this were not so hard!
“‘And since one nowise is debarred
“‘From this, why not escape some sins
“‘By such a method?’”

X.

—Then begins

To the old point, revulsion new—
(For ’tis just this, I bring you to)
If after all we should mistake,
And so renounce life for the sake
Of death and nothing else? You hear
Our friends we jeered at, send the jeer
Back to ourselves with good effect—
‘There *were* my beetles to collect!’
‘My box—a trifle, I confess,
‘But here I hold it, ne’ertheless!’
Poor idiots, (let us pluck up heart
And answer) we, the better part
Have chosen, though ’twere only hope,—
Nor envy moles like you that grope
Amid your veritable muck,
More than the grasshoppers would truck,
For yours, their passionate life away,
That spends itself in leaps all day
To reach the sun, you want the eyes
To see, as they the wings to rise
And match the noble hearts of them!
So, the contemner we condemn,—

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

And, when doubt strikes us, so, we ward
Its stroke off, caught upon our guard,
—Not struck enough to overturn
Our faith, but shake it—make us learn
What I began with, and, I wis,
End, having proved,—how hard it is
To be a Christian!

XI.

“Proved, or not,
“Howe’er you wis, small thanks, I wot,
“You get of mine, for taking pains
“To make it hard to me. Who gains
“By that, I wonder? Here I live
“In trusting ease; and do you drive
“At causing me to lose what most
“Yourself would mourn for when ’twas lost?”

XII.

But, do you see, my friend, that thus
You leave St. Paul for Æschylus?—
—Who made his Titan’s arch-device
The giving men *blind hopes* to spice
The meal of life with, else devoured
In bitter haste, while lo! Death loured
Before them at the platter’s edge!
If faith should be, as we allege,
Quite other than a condiment
To heighten flavors with, or meant
(Like that brave curry of his Grace)
To take at need the victuals’ place?
If having dined you would digest
Besides, and turning to your rest
Should find instead . . .

XIII.

Now, you shall see
And judge if a mere foppery
Pricks on my speaking! I resolve

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

To utter . . . yes, it shall devolve
On you to hear as solemn, strange
And dread a thing as in the range
Of facts,—or fancies, if God will—
E'er happened to our kind! I still
Stand in the cloud, and while it wraps
My face, ought not to speak, perhaps;
Seeing that as I carry through
My purpose, if my words in you
Find veritable listeners,
My story, reason's self avers
Must needs be false—the happy chance!
While, if each human countenance
I meet in London streets all day,
Be what I fear,—my warnings fray
No one, and no one they convert,
And no one helps me to assert
How hard it is to really be
A Christian, and in vacancy
I pour this story!

XIV.

I commence

By trying to inform you, whence
It comes that every Easter-night
As now, I sit up, watch, till light
Shall break, those chimney-stacks and roofs
Give, through my window-pane, grey proofs
That Easter-day is breaking slow.
On such a night, three years ago,
It chanced that I had cause to cross
The common, where the chapel was,
Our friend spoke of, the other day—
You've not forgotten, I dare say.
I fell to musing of the time
So close, the blessed matin-prime
All hearts leap up at, in some guise—
One could not well do otherwise.
Insensibly my thoughts were bent
Toward the main point; I overwent

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Much the same ground of reasoning
As you and I just now: one thing
Remained, however—one that tasked
My soul to answer; and I asked,
Fairly and frankly, what might be
That History, that Faith, to me—
—Me there—not me, in some domain
Built up and peopled by my brain,
Weighing its merits as one weighs
Mere theories for blame or praise,
—The Kingcraft of the Lucumons,
Or Fourier's scheme, its pros and cons,—
But as *my* faith, or none at all.
'How were my case, now, should I fall
'Dead here, this minute—do I lie
'Faithful or faithless?'—Note that I
Inclined thus ever!—little prone
For instance, when I slept alone
In childhood, to go calm to sleep
And leave a closet where might keep
His watch perdue some murderer
Waiting till twelve o'clock to stir,
As good, authentic legends tell
He might—'But how improbable!
'How little likely to deserve
'The pains and trial to the nerve
'Of thrusting head into the dark,'—
Urged my old nurse, and bade me mark
Besides, that, should the dreadful scout
Really lie hid there, to leap out
At first turn of the rusty key,
It were small gain that she could see
In being killed upon the floor
And losing one night's sleep the more.
I tell you, I would always burst
The door ope, know my fate at first.—
This time, indeed, the closet penned
No such assassin: but a friend
Rather, peeped out to guard me, fit
For counsel, Common Sense, to-wit,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Who said a good deal that might pass,—
Heartening, impartial too, it was,
Judge else: 'For, soberly now,—who
'Should be a Christian if not you?'
(Hear how he smoothed me down). 'One takes
'A whole life, sees what course it makes
'Mainly, and not by fits and starts—
'In spite of stoppage which imparts
'Fresh value to the general speed:
'A life, with none, would fly indeed:
'Your progressing is slower—right!
'We deal with progressing, not flight.
'Through baffling senses passionate,
'Fancies as restless,—with a freight
'Of knowledge cumbersome enough
'To sink your ship when waves grow rough,
'Not serve as ballast in the hold,
'I find, 'mid dangers manifold,
'The good bark answers to the helm
'Where Faith sits, easier to o'erwhelm
'Than some stout peasant's heavenly guide,
'Whose hard head could not, if it tried,
'Conceive a doubt, or understand
'How senses hornier than his hand
'Should 'tice the Christian off, his guard—
'More happy! But shall we award
'Less honour to the hull, which, dogged
'By storms, a mere wreck, waterlogged,
'Masts by the board, and bulwarks gone,
'And stanchions going, yet bears on,—
'Than to mere life-boats, built to save,
'And triumph o'er the breaking wave?
'Make perfect your good ship as these,
'And what were her performances!'
I added—'Would the ship reached home!
'I wish indeed "God's kingdom come—"
'The day when I shall see appear
'His bidding, as my duty, clear
'From doubt! And it shall dawn, that day,
'Some future season; Easter may

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

‘Prove, not impossibly, the time—
‘Yes, that were striking—fates would chime
‘So aptly! Easter-morn, to bring
‘The Judgment!—deeper in the Spring
‘Than now, however, when there’s snow
‘Capping the hills; for earth must show
‘All signs of meaning to pursue
‘Her tasks as she was wont to do—
‘—The lark, as taken by surprise
‘As we ourselves, shall recognise
‘Sudden the end: for suddenly
‘It comes—the dreadfulness must be
‘In that—all warrants the belief—
‘“At night it cometh like a thief.”
‘I fancy why the trumpet blows;
‘—Plainly, to wake one. From repose
‘We shall start up, at last awake
‘From life, that insane dream we take
‘For waking now, because it seems.
‘And as, when now we wake from dreams,
‘We say, while we recall them, “Fool,
‘“To let the chance slip, linger cool
‘“When such adventure offered! Just
‘“A bridge to cross, a dwarf to thrust
‘“Aside, a wicked mage to stab—
‘“And, lo ye, I had kissed Queen Mab,”—
‘So shall we marvel why we grudged
‘Our labours here, and idly judged
‘Of Heaven, we might have gained, but lose!
‘Lose? Talk of loss, and I refuse
‘To plead at all! I speak no worse
‘Nor better than my ancient nurse
‘When she would tell me in my youth
‘I well deserved that shapes uncouth
‘Should fright and tease me in my sleep—
‘Why did I not in memory keep
‘Her precept for the evil’s cure?
‘“Pinch your own arm, boy, and be sure
‘“You’ll wake forthwith!”’

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

XV.

And as I said
This nonsense, throwing back my head
With light complacent laugh, I found
Suddenly all the midnight round
One fire. The dome of Heaven had stood
As made up of a multitude
Of handbreadth cloudlets, one vast rack
Of ripples infinite and black,
From sky to sky. Sudden there went,
Like horror and astonishment,
A fierce vindictive scribble of red
Quick flame across, as if one said
(The angry scribe of Judgment) 'There—
'Burn it!' And straight I was aware
That the whole ribwork round, minute
Cloud touching cloud beyond compute,
Was tinted each with its own spot
Of burning at the core, till clot
Jammed against clot, and spilt its fire
Over all heaven, which 'gan suspire
As fanned to measure equable,—
As when great conflagrations kill
Night overhead, and rise and sink,
Reflected. Now the fire would shrink
And wither off the blasted face
Of heaven, and I distinct could trace
The sharp black ridgy outlines left
Unburned like network—then, each cleft
The fire had been sucked back into,
Regorged, and out it surging flew
Furiously, and night writhed inflamed,
Till, tolerating to be tamed
No longer, certain rays world-wide
Shot downwardly, on every side,
Caught past escape; the earth was lit;
As if a dragon's nostril split
And all his famished ire o'erflowed;
Then, as he winced at his Lord's goad,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

Back he inhaled: whereat I found
The clouds into vast pillars bound,
Based on the corners of the earth,
Propping the skies at top: a dearth
Of fire i' the violet intervals,
Leaving exposed the utmost walls
Of time, about to tumble in
And end the world.

XVI.

I felt begin

The Judgment-Day: to retrocede
Was too late now.—'In very deed,
(I uttered to myself) 'that Day!'
The intuition burned away
All darkness from my spirit too—
There, stood I, found and fixed, I knew,
Choosing the world. The choice was made—
And naked and disguiseless stayed,
An unevadeable, the fact.
My brain held ne'ertheless compact
Its senses, nor my heart declined
Its office—rather, both combined
To help me in this juncture—I
Lost not a second,—agony
Gave boldness: there, my life had end
And my choice with it—best defend,
Applaud them! I resolved to say,
'So was I framed by Thee, this way
'I put to use Thy senses here!
'It was so beautiful, so near,
'Thy world,—what could I do but choose
'My part there? Nor did I refuse
'To look above the transient boon
'In time—but it was hard so soon
'As in a short life, to give up
'Such beauty: I had put the cup
'Undrained of half its fullness, by;
'But, to renounce it utterly,
'—That was too hard! Nor did the Cry

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

'Which bade renounce it, touch my brain
'Authentically deep and plain
'Enough, to make my lips let go.
'But Thou, who knowest all, dost know
'Whether I was not, life's brief while,
'Endeavouring to reconcile
'Those lips—too tardily, alas!
'To letting the dear remnant pass,
'One day,—some drops of earthly good
'Untasted! Is it for this mood,
'That Thou, whose earth delights so well,
'Has made its complement a Hell?

XVII.

A final belch of fire like blood,
Overbroke all, next, in one flood
Of doom. Then fire was sky, and sky
Was fire, and both, one extasy,
Then ashes. But I heard no noise
(Whatever was) because a Voice
Beside me spoke thus, "All is done,
"Time end's, Eternity's begun,
"And thou art judged for evermore!"

XVIII.

I looked up; all was as before;
Of that cloud-Tophet overhead,
No trace was left: I saw instead
The common round me, and the sky
Above, stretched drear and emptily
Of life: 'twas the last watch of night,
Except what brings the morning quite,
When the armed angel, conscience-clear
His task nigh done, leans o'er his spear
And gazes on the earth he guards,
Safe one night more through all its wards,
Till God relieve him at his post.
'A dream—a waking dream at most!
(I spoke out quick that I might shake
The horrid nightmare off, and wake.)

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

'The world's gone, yet the world is here?
'Are not all things as they appear?
'Is Judgment past for me alone?
'—And where had place the Great White Throne?
'The rising of the Quick and Dead?
'Where stood they, small and great? Who read
'The sentence from the Opened Book?'
So, by degrees, the blood forsook
My heart, and let it beat afresh:
I knew I should break through the mesh
Of horror, and breathe presently—
When, lo, again, the Voice by me!

XIX.

I saw . . . Oh, brother, 'mid far sands
The palm-tree-cinctured city stands,—
Bright-white beneath, as Heaven, bright-blue,
Above it, while the years pursue
Their course, unable to abate
Its paradisaal laugh at fate:
One morn,—the Arab staggers blind
O'er a new tract of death, calcined
To ashes, silence, nothingness,—
Striving, with dizzy wits, to guess
Whence fell the blow: what if, 'twixt skies
And prostrate earth, he should surprise
The imaged Vapour, head to foot,
Surveying, motionless and mute,
Its work, ere, in a whirlwind rapt,
It vanish up again?—So hapt
My chance. HE stood there. Like the smoke
Pillared o'er Sodom, when day broke,—
I saw Him. One magnificent pall
Mantled in massive fold and fall
His Dread, and coiled in snaky swathes
About His feet: night's black, that bathes
All else, broke, grizzled with despair,
Against the soul of blackness there.
A gesture told the mood within—
That wrapped right hand which based the chin,—

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

That intense meditation fixed
On His procedure,—pity mixed
With the fulfilment of decree.
Motionless, thus, He spoke to me,
Who fell before His feet, a mass,
No man now.

XX.

“All is come to pass.
“Such shows are over for each soul
“They had respect to. In the roll
“Of Judgment which convinced mankind
“Of sin, stood many, bold and blind,
“Terror must burn the truth into:
“Their fate for them!—thou had'st to do
“With absolute omnipotence,
“Able its judgments to dispense
“To the whole race, as every one
“Were its sole object: that is done:
“God is, thou art,—the rest is hurled
“To nothingness for thee. This world,
“This finite life, thou hast preferred,
“In disbelief of God's own word,
“To Heaven and to Infinity.
“Here, the probation was for thee,
“To show thy soul the earthly mixed
“With Heavenly, it must choose betwixt.
“The earthly joys lay palpable,—
“A taint, in each, distinct as well;
“The Heavenly flitted, faint and rare,
“Above them, but as truly were
“Taintless, so in their nature, best.
“Thy choice was earth: thou didst attest
“'Twas fitter spirit should subserve
“The flesh, than flesh refine to nerve
“Beneath the spirit's play. Advance
“No claim to their inheritance
“Who chose the spirit's fugitive
“Brief gleams, and thought, ‘This were to live
“‘Indeed, if rays, completely pure

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

“From flesh that dulls them, should endure,—
“Not shoot in meteor-light athwart
“Our earth, to show how cold and swart
“It lies beneath their fire, but stand
“As stars should, destined to expand,
“Prove veritable worlds, our home !
“Thou said'st,—‘ Let Spirit star the dome
“Of sky, that flesh may miss no peak,
“No nook of earth,—I shall not seek
“Its service further !’ Thou art shut
“Out of the Heaven of Spirit; glut
“Thy sense upon the world : ’tis thine
“For ever—take it !”

XXI.

‘How? Is mine,
‘The world?’ (I cried, while my soul broke
Out in a transport) ‘Hast thou spoke
‘Plainly in that? Earth’s exquisite
‘Treasures of wonder and delight,
‘For me?’

XXII.

The austere Voice returned,—
“So soon made happy? Hadst thou learned
“What God accounteth happiness,
“Thou wouldst not find it hard to guess
“What Hell may be His punishment
“For those who doubt if God invent
“Better than they. Let such men rest
“Content with what they judged the best.
“Let the Unjust usurp at will :
“The Filthy shall be filthy still :
“Miser, there waits the gold for thee !
“Hater, indulge thine enmity !
“And thou, whose heaven, self-ordained,
“Was to enjoy earth unrestrained,
“Do it! Take all the ancient show !
“The woods shall wave, the rivers flow,
“And men apparently pursue

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

"Their works, as they were wont to do,
"While living in probation yet:
"I promise not thou shalt forget
"The past, now gone to its account,
"But leave thee with the old amount
"Of faculties, nor less nor more,
"Unvisited, as heretofore,
"By God's free spirit, that makes an end.
"So, once more, take thy world; expend
"Eternity upon its shows,—
"Flung thee as freely as one rose
"Out of a summer's opulence,
"Over the Eden-barrier whence
"Thou art excluded. Knock in vain!"

XXIII.

I sate up. All was still again.
I breathed free: to my heart, back fled
The warmth. 'But, all the world!' (I said)
I stooped and picked a leaf of fern,
And recollected I might learn
From books, how many myriad sorts
Exist, if one may trust reports,
Each as distinct and beautiful
As this, the very first I cull.
Think, from the first leaf to the last!
Conceive, then, earth's resources! Vast
Exhaustless beauty, endless change
Of wonder! and this foot shall range
Alps, Andes,—and this eye devour
The bee-bird and the aloe-flower?

XXIV.

And the Voice, "Welcome so to rate
"The arras-folds that variegate
"The earth, God's antechamber, well!
"The wise, who waited there, could tell
"By these, what royalties in store
"Lay one step past the entrance-door.
"For whom, was reckoned, not too much,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

"This life's munificence? For such
"As thou,—a race, whereof not one
"Was able, in a million,
"To feel that any marvel lay
"In objects round his feet all day ;
"Nor one, in many millions more,
"Willing, if able, to explore
"The secreter, minuter charm !
"—Brave souls, a fern-leaf could disarm
"Of power to cope with God's intent,—
"Or scared if the South Firmament
"With North-fire did its wings refledge!
"All partial beauty was a pledge
"Of beauty in its plenitude:
"But since the pledge sufficed thy mood,
"Retain it—plenitude be theirs
"Who looked above !"

XXV.

Though sharp despairs
Shot through me, I held up, bore on.
'What is it though my trust is gone
'From natural things? Henceforth my part
'Be less with Nature than with Art!
'For Art supplants, gives mainly worth
'To Nature; 'tis Man stamps the earth—
'And I will seek his impress, seek
'The statuary of the Greek,
'Italy's painting—there my choice
'Shall fix !'

XXVI.

"Obtain it," said the Voice.
"The one form with its single act,
"Which sculptors laboured to abstract,
"The one face, painters tried to draw,
"With its one look, from throngs they saw!
"And that perfection in their soul,
"These only hinted at? The whole,
"They were but parts of? What each laid

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

“His claim to glory on?—afraid
“His fellow-men should give him rank
“By the poor tentatives he shrank
“Smitten at heart from, all the more,
“That gazers pressed in to adore!
“‘Shall I be judged by only these?’
“If such his soul’s capacities,
“Even while he trod the earth,—think, now
“What pomp in Buonarotti’s brow,
“With its new palace-brain where dwells
“Superb the soul, unvexed by cells
“That crumbled with the transient clay!
“What visions will his right hand’s sway
“Still turn to form, as still they burst
“Upon him? How will he quench thirst,
“Titanically infantine,
“Laid at the breast of the Divine?
“Does it confound thee,—this first page
“Emblazoning man’s heritage?—
“Can this alone absorb thy sight,
“As if they were not infinite,—
“Like the omnipotence which tasks
“Itself, to furnish all that asks
“The soul it means to satiate?
“What was the world, the starry state
“Of the broad skies,—what, all displays
“Of power and beauty intermixed,
“Which now thy soul is chained betwixt,—
“What, else, than needful furniture
“For life’s first stage? God’s work, be sure,
“No more spreads wasted, than falls scant:
“He filled, did not exceed, Man’s want
“Of beauty in this life. And pass
“Life’s line,—and what has earth to do,
“Its utmost beauty’s appanage,
“With the requirements of next stage?
“Did God pronounce earth ‘very good’?
“Needs must it be, while understood
“For man’s preparatory state;
“Nothing to heighten nor abate:

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

"But transfer the completeness here,
"To serve a new state's use,—and drear
"Deficiency gapes every side!
"The good, tried once, were bad, retried.
"See the enwrapping rocky niche,
"Sufficient for the sleep, in which
"The lizard breathes for ages safe:
"Split the mould—and as this would chafe
"The creature's new world-widened sense,
"One minute after you dispense
"The thousand sounds and sights that broke
"In, on him, at the chisel's stroke, —
"So, in God's eyes, the earth's first stuff
"Was, neither more nor less, enough
"To house man's soul, man's need fulfil.
"You reckoned it immeasurable:
"So thinks the lizard of his vault!
"Could God be taken in default,
"Short of contrivances, by you,—
"Or reached, ere ready to pursue
"His progress through eternity?
"That chambered rock, the lizard's world,
"Your easy mallet's blow has hurled
"To nothingness for ever; so,
"Has God abolished at a blow
"This world, wherein his saints were pent,—
"Who, though, found grateful and content,
"With the provision there, as thou,
"Yet knew He would not disallow
"Their spirit's hunger, felt as well,—
"Unsated,—not unsatable,
"As Paradise gives proof. Deride
"Their choice now, thou who sit'st outside!"

XXVII.

I cried in anguish, 'Mind, the mind,
'So miserably cast behind,
'To gain what had been wisely lost!
'Oh, let me strive to make the most
'Of the poor stunted soul, I nipped

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

'Of budding wings, else well equipt
'For voyage from summer isle to isle!
'And though she needs must reconcile
'Ambition to the life on ground,
'Still, I can profit by late found
'But precious knowledge. Mind is best—
'I will seize mind, forego the rest
'And try how far my tethered strength
'May crawl in this poor breadth and length.
'—Let me, since I can fly no more,
'At least spin dervish-like about
'(Till giddy rapture almost doubt
'I fly) through circling sciences,
'Philosophies and histories!
'Should the whirl slacken there, then Verse,
'Fining to music, shall asperse
'Fresh and fresh fire-dew, till I strain
'Intoxicate, half-break my chain!
'Not joyless, though more favoured feet
'Stand calm, where I want wings to beat
'The floor? At least earth's bond is broke!'

XXVIII.

Then, (sickening even while I spoke
'Let me alone! No answer, pray,
'To this! I know what Thou wilt say!
'All still is earth's,—to Know, as much
'As Feel its truths, which if we touch
'With sense or apprehend in soul,
'What matter? I have reached the goal—
'"Where to does Knowledge serve!" will burn
'My eyes, too sure, at every turn!
'I cannot look back now, nor stake
'Bliss on the race, for running's sake.
'The goal's a ruin like the rest!—
—"And so much worse thy latter quest,
(Added the Voice) "that even on earth
"Whenever, in man's soul, had birth
"Those intuitions, grasps of guess,
"That pull the more into the less,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

"Making the finite comprehend
"Infinity, the bard would spend
"Such praise alone, upon his craft,
"As, when wind-lyres obey the waft,
"Goes to the craftsman who arranged
"The seven strings, changed them and rechanged—
"Knowing it was the South that harped.
"He felt his song, in singing, warped,
"Distinguished his and God's part: whence
"A world of spirit as of sense
"Was plain to him, yet not too plain,
"Which he could traverse, not remain
"A guest in:—else were permanent
"Heaven upon earth, its gleams were meant
"To sting with hunger for the light,—
"Made visible in Verse, despite
"The veiling weakness,—truth by means
"Of fable, showing while it screens,—
"Since highest truth, man e'er supplied,
"Was ever fable on outside.
"Such gleams made bright the earth an age;
"Now, the whole sun's his heritage!
"Take up thy world, it is allowed,
"Thou who hast entered in the cloud!

XXIX.

Then I—'Behold, my spirit bleeds,
'Catches no more at broken reeds,—
'But lilies flower those reeds above—
'I let the world go, and take love!
'Love survives in me, albeit those
'I loved are henceforth masks and shows,
'Not loving men and women: still
'I mind how love repaired all ill,
'Cured wrong, soothed grief, made earth amends
'With parents, brothers, children, friends!
'Some semblance of a woman yet
'With eyes to help me to forget,
'Shall live with me; and I will match
'Departed love with love, attach

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

'Its fragments to my whole, nor scorn
'The poorest of the grains of corn
'I save from shipwreck on this isle,
'Trusting its barrenness may smile
'With happy foodful green one day,
'More precious for the pains. I pray,
'For love, then, only!'

XXX.

At the word,
The Form, I looked to have been stirred
With pity and approval, rose
O'er me, as when the headsman throws
Axe over shoulder to make end—
I fell prone, letting Him expend
His wrath, while, thus, the inflicting Voice
Smote me. "Is this thy final choice?
"Love is the best? 'Tis somewhat late!
"And all thou dost enumerate
"Of power and beauty in the world,
"The mightiness of love was curled
"Inextricably round about.
"Love lay within it and without,
"To clasp thee,—but in vain! Thy soul
"Still shrunk from Him who made the whole,
"Still set deliberate aside
"His love!—Now take love! Well betide
"Thy tardy conscience! Haste to take
"The show of love for the name's sake,
"Remembering every moment Who
"Beside creating thee unto
"These ends, and these for thee, was said
"To undergo death in thy stead
"In flesh like thine: so ran the tale.
"What doubt in thee could countervail
"Belief in it? Upon the ground
"That in the story had been found
"Too much love? How could God love so?
"He who in all his works below
"Adapted to the needs of man,

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

"Made love the basis of the plan,—
"Did love, as was demonstrated:
"While man, who was so fit instead,
"To hate, as every day gave proof,—
"You thought man, for his kind's behoof,
"Both could and would invent that scheme
"Of perfect love—'twould well beseem
"Cain's nature thou wast wont to praise.
"Not tally with God's usual ways!"

XXXI.

And I cowered deprecatingly—
'Thou Love of God! Or let me die,
'Or grant what shall seem Heaven almost!
'Let me not know that all is lost,
'Though lost it be—leave me not tied
'To this despair, this corpse-like bride!
'Let that old life seem mine—no more—
'With limitation as before,
'With darkness, hunger, toil, distress:
'Be all the earth a wilderness!
'Only let me go on, go on,
'Still hoping ever and anon
'To reach one eve the Better Land!'

XXXII.

Then did the Form expand, expand—
I knew Him through the dread disguise,
As the whole God within his eyes
Embraced me.

XXXIII.

When I lived again,
The day was breaking,—the grey plain
I rose from, silvered thick with dew.
Was this a vision? False or true?
Since then, three varied years are spent,
And commonly my mind is bent
To think it was a dream—be sure
A mere dream and distemperature—

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

The last day's watching: then the night,—
The shock of that strange Northern Light
Set my head swimming, bred in me
A dream. And so I live, you see,
Go through the world, try, prove, reject,
Prefer, still struggling to effect
My warfare; happy that I can
Be crossed and thwarted as a man,
Not left in God's contempt apart,
With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,
Tame in earth's paddock as her prize.
Thank God she still each method tries
To catch me, who may yet escape,
She knows, the fiend in angel's shape!
Thank God, no paradise stands barred
To entry, and I find it hard
To be a Christian, as I said!
Still every now and then my head
Raised glad, sinks mournful—all grows drear
Spite of the sunshine, while I fear
And think, 'How dreadful to be grudged
'No ease henceforth, as one that's judged,
'Condemned to earth for ever, shut
'From Heaven' . .

But Easter-Day breaks! But
Christ rises! Mercy every way
Is infinite,—and who can say?

MEN AND WOMEN

MEN AND WOMEN

LOVE AMONG THE RUINS

I.

WHERE the quiet-coloured end of evening smiles
Miles and miles
On the solitary pastures where our sheep
Half-asleep
Tinkle homeward thro' the twilight, stray or stop
As they crop—

II.

Was the site once of a city great and gay,
(So they say)
Of our country's very capital, its prince
Ages since
Held his court in, gathered councils, wielding far
Peace or war.

III.

Now—the country does not even boast a tree,
As you see,
To distinguish slopes of verdure, certain rills
From the hills
Intersect and give a name to, (else they run
Into one)

LOVE AMONG THE RUINS

IV.

Where the domed and daring palace shot its spires
Up like fires
O'er the hundred-gated circuit of a wall
Bounding all,
Made of marble, men might march on nor be prest,
Twelve abreast.

V.

And such plenty and perfection, see, of grass
Never was !
Such a carpet as, this summer-time, o'erspreads
And embeds
Every vestige of the city, guessed alone,
Stock or stone—

VI.

Where a multitude of men breathed joy and woe
Long ago ;
Lust of glory pricked their hearts up, dread of shame
Struck them tame ;
And that glory and that shame alike, the gold
Bought and sold.

VII.

Now,—the single little turret that remains
On the plains,
By the caper overrooted, by the gourd
Overscored,
While the patching houseleek's head of blossom winks
Through the chinks—

VIII.

Marks the basement whence a tower in ancient time
Sprang sublime,
And a burning ring all round, the chariots traced
As they raced,
And the monarch and his minions and his dames
Viewed the games.

MEN AND WOMEN

IX.

And I know, while thus the quiet-coloured eve
 Smiles to leave
To their folding, all our many-tinkling fleece
 In such peace,
And the slopes and rills in undistinguished grey
 Melt away—

X.

That a girl with eager eyes and yellow hair
 Waits me there
In the turret, whence the charioteers caught soul
 For the goal,
When the king looked, where she looks now, breath-
 less, dumb
 Till I come.

XI.

But he looked upon the city, every side,
 Far and wide,
All the mountains topped with temples, all the glades'
 Colonnades,
All the causeys, bridges, aqueducts,—and then,
 All the men!

XII.

When I do come, she will speak not, she will stand,
 Either hand
On my shoulder, give her eyes the first embrace
 Of my face,
Ere we rush, ere we extinguish sight and speech
 Each on each.

XIII.

In one year they sent a million fighters forth
 South and north,
And they built their gods a brazen pillar high
 As the sky,
Yet reserved a thousand chariots in full force—
 Gold, of course.

A LOVER'S QUARREL

XIV.

Oh, heart! oh, blood that freezes, blood that burns!
Earth's returns
For whole centuries of folly, noise and sin!
Shut them in,
With their triumphs and their glories and the rest.
Love is best!

A LOVER'S QUARREL

I.

Oh, what a dawn of day!
How the March sun feels like May!
All is blue again
After last night's rain,
And the south dries the hawthorn-spray.
Only, my Love's away!
I'd as lief that the blue were grey.

II.

Runnels, which rillels swell,
Must be dancing down the dell
With a foamy head
On the beryl bed
Paven smooth as a hermit's cell;
Each with a tale to tell,
Could my Love but attend as well.

III.

Dearest, three months ago!
When we lived blocked-up with snow,—
When the wind would edge
In and in his wedge,
In, as far as the point could go—
Not to our ingle, though,
Where we loved each the other so!

MEN AND WOMEN

IV.

Laughs with so little cause !
We devised games out of straws,
 We would try and trace
 One another's face
In the ash, as an artist draws ;
 Free on each other's flaws,
How we chattered like two church laws !

V.

What's in the "Times" ?—a scold
At the emperor deep and cold ;
 He has taken a bride
 To his gruesome side,
That's as fair as himself is bold :
 There they sit ermine-stoled,
And she powders her hair with gold.

VI.

Fancy the Pampas' sheen !
Miles and miles of gold and green
 Where the sun-flowers blow
 In a solid glow,
And to break now and then the screen—
 Black neck and eyeballs keen,
Up a wild horse leaps between !

VII.

Try, will our table turn ?
Lay your hands there light, and yearn
 Till the yearning slips
 Thro' the finger tips
In a fire which a few discern,
 And a very few feel burn,
And the rest, they may live and learn !

VIII.

Then we would up and pace,
For a change, about the place,
 Each with arm o'er neck.

A LOVER'S QUARREL

'Tis our quarter-deck,
We are seamen in woeful case.
Help in the ocean-space!
Or, if no help, we'll embrace.

IX.

See, how she looks now, drest
In a sledging-cap and vest.
'Tis a huge fur cloak—
Like a reindeer's yoke
Falls the lappet along the breast:
Sleeves for her arms to rest,
Or to hang, as my Love likes best.

X.

Teach me to flirt a fan
As the Spanish ladies can,
Or I tint your lip
With a burnt stick's tip
And you turn into such a man!
Just the two spots that span
Half the bill of the young male swan.

XI.

Dearest, three months ago
When the mesmeriser Snow
With his hand's first sweep
Put the earth to sleep,
'Twas a time when the heart could show
All—how was earth to know,
'Neath the mute hand's to-and-fro!

XII.

Dearest, three months ago
When we loved each other so,
Lived and loved the same
Till an evening came
When a shaft from the Devil's bow
Pierced to our ingle-glow,
And the friends were friend and foe!

MEN AND WOMEN

XIII.

Not from the heart beneath—
'Twas a bubble born of breath,
 Neither sneer nor vaunt,
 Nor reproach nor taunt.
See a word, how it severeth!
 Oh, power of life and death
In the tongue, as the Preacher saith!

XIV.

Woman, and will you cast
For a word, quite off at last,
 Me, your own, your you,—
 Since, as Truth is true,
I was you all the happy past—
 Me do you leave aghast
With the memories we amassed?

XV.

Love, if you knew the light
That your soul casts in my sight,
 How I look to you
 For the pure and true,
And the beauteous and the right,—
 Bear with a moment's spite
When a mere mote threatens the white!

XVI.

What of a hasty word?
Is the fleshly heart not stirred
 By a worm's pin-prick
 Where its roots are quick?
See the eye, by a fly's foot blurred—
 Ear, when a straw is heard
Scratch the brain's coat of curd!

XVII.

Foul be the world or fair,
More or less, how can I care?
 'Tis the world the same

A LOVER'S QUARREL

For my praise or blame,
And endurance is easy there.
Wrong in the one thing rare—
Oh, it is hard to bear!

XVIII.

Here's the spring back or close,
When the almond-blossom blows;
We shall have the word
In that minor third
There is none but the cuckoo knows—
Heaps of the guelder-rose!
I must bear with it, I suppose.

XIX.

Could but November come,
Were the noisy birds struck dumb
At the warning slash
Of his driver's-lash—
I would laugh like the valiant Thumb
Facing the castle glum
And the giant's fee-faw-fum!

XX.

Then, were the world well stript
Of the gear wherein equipped
We can stand apart,
Heart dispense with heart
In the sun, with the flowers unnipped,—
Oh, the world's hangings ripped,
We were both in a bare-walled crypt!

XXI.

Each in the crypt would cry
"But one freezes here! and why?
When a heart as chill
At my own would thrill
Back to life, and its fires out-fly?
Heart, shall we live or die?
The rest, . . . settle it by and by!"

MEN AND WOMEN

XXII.

So, she'd efface the score,
And forgive me as before.
 Just at twelve o'clock
 I shall hear her knock
In the worst of a storm's uproar—
 I shall pull her through the door—
I shall have her for evermore!

EVELYN HOPE

I.

BEAUTIFUL Evelyn Hope is dead !
 Sit and watch by her side an hour.
That is her book-shelf, this her bed ;
 She plucked that piece of geranium-flower,
Beginning to die too, in the glass.
 Little has yet been changed, I think—
The shutters are shut, no light may pass
 Save two long rays thro' the hinge's chink.

II.

Sixteen years old when she died !
 Perhaps she had scarcely heard my name—
It was not her time to love : beside,
 Her life had many a hope and aim,
Duties enough and little cares,
 And now was quiet, now astir—
Till God's hand beckoned unawares,
 And the sweet white brow is all of her.

III.

Is it too late then, Evelyn Hope ?
 What, your soul was pure and true,
The good stars met in your horoscope,
 Made you of spirit, fire and dew—

EVELYN HOPE

And just because I was thrice as old,
And our paths in the world diverged so wide,
Each was nought to each, must I be told?
We were fellow mortals, nought beside?

IV.

No, indeed! for God above
Is great to grant, as mighty to make,
And creates the love to reward the love,—
I claim you still, for my own love's sake!
Delayed it may be for more lives yet,
Through worlds I shall traverse, not a few—
Much is to learn and much to forget
Ere the time be come for taking you.

V.

But the time will come,—at last it will,
When, Evelyn Hope, what meant, I shall say,
In the lower earth, in the years long still,
That body and soul so pure and gay?
Why your hair was amber, I shall divine,
And your mouth of your own geranium's red—
And what you would do with me, in fine,
In the new life come in the old one's stead.

VI.

I have lived, I shall say, so much since then,
Given up myself so many times,
Gained me the gains of various men,
Ransacked the ages, spoiled the climes;
Yet one thing, one, in my soul's full scope,
Either I missed or itself missed me—
And I want and find you, Evelyn Hope!
What is the issue? let us see!

VII.

I loved you, Evelyn, all the while;
My heart seemed full as it could hold—
There was place and to spare for the frank young
smile

MEN AND WOMEN

And the red young mouth and the hair's young gold.

So, hush,—I will give you this leaf to keep—

See, I shut it inside the sweet cold hand.

There, that is our secret! go to sleep;

You will wake, and remember, and understand.

UP AT A VILLA—DOWN IN THE CITY

(AS DISTINGUISHED BY AN ITALIAN PERSON OF QUALITY)

I.

HAD I but plenty of money, money enough and to spare,

The house for me, no doubt, were a house in the city-square.

Ah, such a life, such a life, as one leads at the window there!

II.

Something to see, by Bacchus, something to hear, at least!

There, the whole day long, one's life is a perfect feast;

While up at a villa one lives, I maintain it, no more than a beast.

III.

Well now, look at our villa! stuck like the horn of a bull

Just on a mountain's edge as bare as the creature's skull,

Save a mere shag of a bush with hardly a leaf to pull!

—I scratch my own, sometimes, to see if the hair's turned wool.

UP AT A VILLA

IV.

But the city, oh the city—the square with the houses !
Why ?

They are stone-faced, white as a curd, there's something to take the eye !

Houses in four straight lines, not a single front awry !
You watch who crosses and gossips, who saunters,
who hurries by :

Green blinds, as a matter of course, to draw when
the sun gets high ;

And the shops with fanciful signs which are painted
properly.

V.

What of a villa ? Though winter be over in March
by rights,

'Tis May perhaps ere the snow shall have withered
well off the heights :

You've the brown ploughed land before, where the
oxen steam and wheeze,

And the hills over-smoked behind by the faint grey
olive trees.

VI.

Is it better in May, I ask you ? you've summer all at
once ;

In a day he leaps complete with a few strong April
suns !

'Mid the sharp short emerald wheat, scarce risen
three fingers well,

The wild tulip, at end of its tube, blows out its
great red bell,

Like a thin clear bubble of blood, for the children to
pick and sell.

VII.

Is it ever hot in the square ? There's a fountain to
spout and splash !

In the shade it sings and springs ; in the shine such
foam-bows flash

MEN AND WOMEN

On the horses with curling fish-tails, that prance and
paddle and pash
Round the lady atop in the conch—fifty gazers do not
abash,
Though all that she wears is some weeds round her
waist in a sort of sash!

VIII.

All the year long at the villa, nothing's to see though
you linger,
Except you cypress that points like Death's lean
lifted forefinger.
Some think fireflies pretty, when they mix in the
corn and mingle,
Or thrud the stinking hemp till the stalks of it seem
a-tingle.
Late August or early September, the stunning cicala
is shrill,
And the bees keep their tiresome whine round the
resinous firs on the hill.
Enough of the seasons,—I spare you the months of
the fever and chill.

IX.

Ere opening your eyes in the city, the blessed church-
bells begin:
No sooner the bells leave off, than the diligence
rattles in:
You get the pick of the news, and it costs you never
a pin.
By and by there's the travelling doctor gives pills,
lets blood, draws teeth;
Or the Pulcinello-trumpet breaks up the market
beneath.
At the post-office such a scene-picture—the new play,
piping hot!
And a notice how, only this morning, three liberal
thieves were shot.
Above it, behold the archbishop's most fatherly of
rebukes,

UP AT A VILLA

And beneath, with his crown and his lion, some little
new law of the Duke's!
Or a sonnet with flowery marge, to the Reverend
Don So-and-so
Who is Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarca, Saint Jerome, and
Cicero,
"And moreover," (the sonnet goes rhyming,) "the
skirts of St. Paul has reached,
Having preached us those six Lent-lectures more
unctuous than ever he preached."
Noon strikes,—here sweeps the procession! our Lady
borne smiling and smart
With a pink gauze gown all spangles, and seven
swords stuck in her heart!
Bang, whang, whang, goes the drum, *tootle-te-tootle*
the fife;
No keeping one's haunches still: it's the greatest
pleasure in life.

x.

But bless you, it's dear—it's dear! fowls, wine, at
double the rate.
They have clapped a new tax upon salt, and what oil
pays passing the gate
It's a horror to think of. And so, the villa for me,
not the city!
Beggars can scarcely be choosers—but still—ah, the
pity, the pity!
Look, two and two go the priests, then the monks
with cowls and sandals,
And the penitents dressed in white shirts, a-holding
the yellow candles.
One, he carries a flag up straight, and another a
cross with handles,
And the Duke's guard brings up the rear, for the
better prevention of scandals.
Bang, whang, whang, goes the drum, *tootle-te-tootle*
the fife.
Oh, a day in the city-square, there is no such pleasure
in life!

MEN AND WOMEN

A WOMAN'S LAST WORD

I.

LET's contend no more, Love,
Strive nor weep—
All be as before, Love,
—Only sleep!

II.

What so wild as words are?
—I and thou
In debate, as birds are,
Hawk on bough!

III.

See the creature stalking
While we speak—
Hush and hide the talking,
Cheek on cheek!

IV.

What so false as truth is,
False to thee?
Where the serpent's tooth is,
Shun the tree—

V.

Where the apple reddens
Never pry—
Lest we lose our Edens,
Eve and I!

VI.

Be a god and hold me
With a charm—
Be a man and fold me
With thine arm!

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

VII.

Teach me, only teach, Love!
As I ought
I will speak thy speech, Love,
Think thy thought—

VIII.

Meet, if thou require it,
Both demands,
Laying flesh and spirit
In thy hands!

IX.

That shall be to-morrow
Not to-night:
I must bury sorrow
Out of sight.

X.

—Must a little weep, Love,
—Foolish me!
And so fall asleep, Love,
Loved by thee.

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

I AM poor brother Lippo, by your leave!
You need not clap your torches to my face.
Zooks, what's to blame? you think you see a monk!
What, it's past midnight, and you go the rounds,
And here you catch me at an alley's end
Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar.
The Carmine's my cloister: hunt it up,
Do, - harry out, if you must show your zeal,
Whatever rat, there, haps on his wrong hole,
And nip each softling of a wee white mouse,

MEN AND WOMEN

Weke, weke, that's crept to keep him company!
Aha, you know your betters? Then, you'll take
Your hand away that's fiddling on my throat,
And please to know me likewise. Who am I?
Why, one, sir, who is lodging with a friend
Three streets off—he's a certain . . . how d'ye call?
Master—a . . . Cosimo of the Medici,
In the house that caps the corner. Boh! you were
best!

Remember and tell me, the day you're hanged,
How you affected such a gullet's-gripe!
But you, sir, it concerns you that your knaves
Pick up a manner nor discredit you.
Zooks, are we pilchards, that they sweep the streets
And count fair prize what comes into their net?
He's Judas to a tittle, that man is!
Just such a face! why, sir, you make amends.
Lord, I'm not angry! Bid your hangdogs go
Drink out this quarter-florin to the health
Of the munificent House that harbours me
(And many more beside, lads! more beside!)
And all's come square again. I'd like his face—
His, elbowing on his comrade in the door
With the pike and lantern,—for the slave that holds
John Baptist's head a-dangle by the hair
With one hand ("look you, now," as who should say)
And his weapon in the other, yet unwiped!
It's not your chance to have a bit of chalk,
A wood-coal or the like? or you should see!
Yes, I'm the painter, since you style me so.
What, brother Lippo's doings, up and down,
You know them and they take you? like enough!
I saw the proper twinkle in your eye—
"Tell you I liked your looks at very first.
Let's sit and set things straight now, hip to haunch.
Here's spring come, and the nights one makes up
bands

To roam the town and sing out carnival,
And I've been three weeks shut within my mew,
A-painting for the great man, saints and saints

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

And saints again. I could not paint all night—
Ouf! I leaned out of window for fresh air.
There came a hurry of feet and little feet,
A sweep of lute-strings, laughs, and whiffs of song,—
Flower o' the broom,
Take away love, and our earth is a tomb!
Flower o' the quince,
I let Lisa go, and what good's in life since?
Flower o' the thyme—and so on. Round they went.
Scarce had they turned the corner when a titter,
Like the skipping of rabbits by moonlight,—three
slim shapes—

And a face that looked up . . . zooks, sir, flesh and
blood,

That's all I'm made of! Into shreds it went,
Curtain and counterpane and coverlet,
All the bed furniture—a dozen knots,
There was a ladder! down I let myself,
Hands and feet, scrambling somehow, and so dropped,
And after them. I came up with the fun
Hard by St. Laurence, hail fellow, well met,—
Flower o' the rose,

If I've been merry, what matter who knows?
And so as I was stealing back again
To get to bed and have a bit of sleep
Ere I rise up to-morrow and go work
On Jerome knocking at his poor old breast
With his great round stone to subdue the flesh,
You snap me of the sudden. Ah, I see!
Though your eye twinkles still, you shake your
head—

Mine's shaved,—a monk, you say—the sting's in that!
If Master Cosimo announced himself,
Mum's the word naturally; but a monk!
Come, what am I a beast for? tell us, now!
I was a baby when my mother died
And father died and left me in the street.
I starved there, God knows how, a year or two
On fig-skins, melon-parings, rinds and shucks,
Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day

MEN AND WOMEN

My stomach being empty as your hat,
The wind doubled me up and down I went.
Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand,
(Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)
And so along the wall, over the bridge,
By the straight cut to the convent. Six words, there,
While I stood munching my first bread that month:
"So, boy, you're minded," quoth the good fat father
Wiping his own mouth, 'twas refection-time,—
"To quit this very miserable world?
Will you renounce" . . . The mouthful of bread?
thought I;
By no means! Brief, they made a monk of me;
I did renounce the world, its pride and greed,
Palace, farm, villa, shop and banking-house,
Trash, such as these poor devils of Medici
Have given their hearts to—all at eight years old.
Well, sir, I found in time, you may be sure,
'Twas not for nothing—the good bellyful,
The warm serge and the rope that goes all round,
And day-long blessed idleness beside!
"Let's see what the urchin's fit for"—that came next.
Not overmuch their way, I must confess.
Such a to-do! they tried me with their books.
Lord, they'd have taught me Latin in pure waste!
Flower o' the clove,
All the Latin I construe is, "amo" I love!
But, mind you, when a boy starves in the streets
Eight years together, as my fortune was,
Watching folk's faces to know who will fling
The bit of half-stripped grape-bunch he desires,
And who will curse or kick him for his pains—
Which gentleman processional and fine,
Holding a candle to the Sacrament
Will wink and let him lift a plate and catch
The droppings of the wax to sell again,
Or holla for the Eight and have him whipped,—
How say I?—nay, which dog bites, which lets drop
His bone from the heap of offal in the street!
—The soul and sense of him grow sharp alike,

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

He learns the look of things, and none the less
For admonitions from the hunger-pinch.
I had a store o' such remarks, be sure,
Which, after I found leisure, turned to use :
I drew men's faces on my copy-books,
Scrawled them within the antiphonary's marge,
Joined legs and arms to the long music-notes,
Found nose and eyes and chin for A.s and B.s,
And made a string of pictures of the world
Betwixt the ins and outs of verb and noun,
On the wall, the bench, the door. The monks looked
black.

"Nay," quoth the Prior, "turn him out, d'ye say ?
In no wise. Lose a crow and catch a lark.
What if at last we get our man of parts,
We Carmelites, like those Camaldolese
And Preaching Friars, to do our church up fine
And put the front on it that ought to be !"
And hereupon they bade me daub away.
Thank you ! my head being crammed, their walls a
blank,

Never was such prompt disemburdening.
First, every sort of monk, the black and white,
I drew them, fat and lean : then, folks at church,
From good old gossips waiting to confess
Their cribs of barrel-droppings, candle-ends,—
To the breathless fellow at the altar-foot,
Fresh from his murder, safe and sitting there
With the little children round him in a row
Of admiration, half for his beard and half
For that white anger of his victim's son
Shaking a fist at him with one fierce arm,
Signing himself with the other because of Christ
(Whose sad face on the cross sees only this
After the passion of a thousand years)
Till some poor girl, her apron o'er her head
Which the intense eyes looked through, came at eve
On tip-toe, said a word, dropped in a loaf,
Her pair of ear-rings and a bunch of flowers
The brute took growling, prayed, and then was gone.

MEN AND WOMEN

I painted all, then cried "'tis ask and have—
Choose, for more's ready!"—laid the ladder flat,
And showed my covered bit of cloister-wall.
The monks closed in a circle and praised loud
Till checked, (taught what to see and not to see,
Being simple bodies) "that's the very man!
Look at the boy who stoops to pat the dog!
That woman's like the Prior's niece who comes
To care about his asthma: it's the life!"
But there my triumph's straw-fire flared and fumed—
Their betters took their turn to see and say:
The Prior and the learned pulled a face
And stopped all that in no time. "How? what's
here?"

Quite from the mark of painting, bless us all!
Faces, arms, legs and bodies like the true
As much as pea and pea! it's devil's game!
Your business is not to catch men with show,
With homage to the perishable clay,
But lift them over it, ignore it all,
Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh.
Your business is to paint the souls of men—
Man's soul, and it's a fire, smoke . . . no it's not . . .
It's vapour done up like a new-born babe—
(In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)
It's . . . well, what matters talking, it's the soul!
Give us no more of body than shows soul.
Here's Giotto, with his Saint a-praising God!
That sets you praising,—why not stop with him?
Why put all thoughts of praise out of our heads
With wonder at lines, colours, and what not?
Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!
Rub all out, try at it a second time.
Oh, that white smallish female with the breasts,
She's just my niece . . . Herodias, I would say,—
Who went and danced and got men's heads cut off—
Have it all out!" Now, is this sense, I ask?
A fine way to paint soul, by painting body
So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further
And can't fare worse! Thus, yellow does for white

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

When what you put for yellow's simply black,
And any sort of meaning looks intense
When all beside itself means and looks nought.
Why can't a painter lift each foot in turn,
Left foot and right foot, go a double step,
Make his flesh liker and his soul more like,
Both in their order? Take the prettiest face,
The Prior's niece . . . patron-saint—is it so pretty
You can't discover if it means hope, fear,
Sorrow or joy? won't beauty go with these?
Suppose I've made her eyes all right and blue,
Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash,
And then add soul and heighten them threefold?
Or say there's beauty with no soul at all—
(I never saw it—put the case the same—)
If you get simple beauty and nought else,
You get about the best thing God invents,—
That's somewhat. And you'll find the soul you have
missed,

Within yourself when you return Him thanks!
"Rub all out!" well, well, there's my life, in short,
And so the thing has gone on ever since.
I'm grown a man no doubt, I've broken bounds—
You should not take a fellow eight years old
And make him swear to never kiss the girls—
I'm my own master, paint now as I please—
Having a friend, you see, in the Corner-house!
Lord, its fast holding by the rings in front—
Those great rings serve more purposes than just
To plant a flag in, or tie up a horse!
And yet the old schooling sticks—the old grave eyes
Are peeping o'er my shoulder as I work,
The heads shake still—"It's Art's decline, my son!
You're not of the true painters, great and old:
Brother Angelico's the man, you'll find:
Brother Lorenzo stands his single peer.
Fag on at flesh, you'll never make the third!"
Flower o' the pine,
You keep your mistr . . . manners, and I'll stick to
mine!

MEN AND WOMEN

I'm not the third, then : bless us, they must know !
Don't you think they're the likeliest to know,
They, with their Latin ? so I swallow my rage,
Clench my teeth, suck my lips in tight, and paint
To please them—sometimes do, and sometimes don't,
For, doing most, there's pretty sure to come
A turn—some warm eve finds me at my saints—
A laugh, a cry, the business of the world—
(*Flower o' the peach,*
Death for us all, and his own life for each !)
And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs o'er,
The world and life's too big to pass for a dream,
And I do these wild things in sheer despite,
And play the fooleries you catch me at,
In pure rage ! the old mill-horse, out at grass
After hard years, throws up his stiff heels so,
Although the miller does not preach to him
The only good of grass is to make chaff.
What would men have ? Do they like grass or no—
May they or mayn't they ? all I want's the thing
Settled for ever one way : as it is,
You tell too many lies and hurt yourself.
You don't like what you only like too much,
You do like what, if given you at your word,
You find abundantly detestable.
For me, I think I speak as I was taught—
I always see the Garden and God there
A-making man's wife—and, my lesson learned,
The value and significance of flesh,
I can't unlearn ten minutes afterward.
You understand me : I'm a beast, I know.
But see, now—why, I see as certainly
As that the morning-star's about to shine,
What will hap some day. We've a youngster here
Comes to our convent, studies what I do,
Slouches and stares and lets no atom drop—
His name is Guidi—he'll not mind the monks—
They call him Hulking Tom, he lets them talk—
He picks my practice up—he'll paint apace,
I hope so—though I never live so long,

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

I know what's sure to follow. You be judge!
You speak no Latin more than I, belike—
However, you're my man, you've seen the world
—The beauty and the wonder and the power,
The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,
Changes, surprises,—and God made it all!
—For what? do you feel thankful, ay or no,
For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,
The mountain round it and the sky above,
Much more the figures of man, woman, child,
These are the frame to? What's it all about?
To be passed o'er, despised? or dwelt upon,
Wondered at? oh, this last of course, you say.
But why not do as well as say,—paint these
Just as they are, careless what comes of it?
God's works—paint any one, and count it crime
To let a truth slip. Don't object, "His works
Are here already—nature is complete:
Suppose you reproduce her—(which you can't)
There's no advantage! you must beat her, then."
For, don't you mark, we're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have
passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
And so they are better, painted—better to us,
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that—
God uses us to help each other so,
Lending our minds out. Have you noticed, now,
Your cullion's hanging face? A bit of chalk,
And trust me but you should, though! How much
more,
If I drew higher things with the same truth!
That were to take the Prior's pulpit-place,
Interpret God to all of you! oh, oh,
It makes me mad to see what men shall do
And we in our graves! This world's no blot for us,
Nor blank—it means intensely, and means good:
To find its meaning is my meat and drink.
"Ay, but you don't so instigate to prayer,"
Strikes in the Prior! "when your meaning's plain

MEN AND WOMEN

It does not say to folks—remember matins—
Or, mind you fast next Friday.” Why, for this
What need of art at all? A skull and bones,
Two bits of stick nailed cross-wise, or, what’s best,
A bell to chime the hour with, does as well.
I painted a St. Laurence six months since
At Prato, splashed the fresco in fine style.
“How looks my painting, now the scaffold’s down?”
I ask a brother: “Hugely,” he returns—
“Already not one phiz of your three slaves
That turn the Deacon off his toasted side,
But’s scratched and prodded to our heart’s content,
The pious people have so eased their own
When coming to say prayers there in a rage.
We get on fast to see the bricks beneath.
Expect another job this time next year,
For pity and religion grow i’ the crowd—
Your painting serves its purpose!” Hang the fools!

—That is—you’ll not mistake an idle word
Spoke in a huff by a poor monk, God wot,
Tasting the air this spicy night which turns
The unaccustomed head like Chianti wine!
Oh, the church knows! don’t misreport me, now!
It’s natural a poor monk out of bounds
Should have his apt word to excuse himself:
And hearken how I plot to make amends.
I have bethought me: I shall paint a piece
. . . There’s for you! Give me six months, then go,
see

Something in Sant’ Ambrogio’s . . . (bless the nuns!
They want a cast of my office) I shall paint
God in the midst, Madonna and her babe,
Ringed by a bowery, flowery angel-brood,
Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet
As puff on puff of grated orris-root
When ladies crowd to church at midsummer.
And then in the front, of course a saint or two—
Saint John, because he saves the Florentines,
Saint Ambrose, who puts down in black and white

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

The convent's friends and gives them a long day,
And Job, I must have him there past mistake,
The man of Uz, (and Us without the z,
Painters who need his patience). Well, all these
Secured at their devotions, up shall come
Out of a corner when you least expect,
As one by a dark stair into a great light,
Music and talking, who but Lippo! I!—
Mazed, motionless and moon-struck—I'm the man!
Back I shrink—what is this I see and hear?
I, caught up with my monk's things by mistake,
My old serge gown and rope that goes all round,
I, in this presence, this pure company!
Where's a hole, where's a corner for escape?
Then steps a sweet angelic slip of a thing
Forward, puts out a soft palm—"Not so fast!"
—Addresses the celestial presence, "nay—
He made you and devised you, after all,
Though he's none of you! Could Saint John there,
draw—

His camel-hair make up a painting-brush?
We come to brother Lippo for all that,
Iste perfecit opus!" So, all smile—
I shuffle sideways with my blushing face
Under the cover of a hundred wings
Thrown like a spread of kirtles when you're gay
And play hot cockles, all the doors being shut,
Till, wholly unexpected, in there pops
The hothead husband! Thus I scuttle off
To some safe bench behind, not letting go
The palm of her, the little lily thing
That spoke the good word for me in the nick,
Like the Prior's niece . . . Saint Lucy, I would say.
And so all's saved for me, and for the church
A pretty picture gained. Go, six months hence!
Your hand, sir, and good-bye: no lights, no lights!
The street's hushed, and I know my own way back—
Don't fear me! There's the grey beginning. Zooks!

MEN AND WOMEN

A TOCCATA OF GALUPPI'S

I.

OH, Galuppi, Baldassaro, this is very sad to find!
I can hardly misconceive you; it would prove me deaf
and blind;
But although I give you credit, 'tis with such a heavy
mind!

II.

Here you come with your old music, and here's all the
good it brings.
What, they lived once thus at Venice, where the mer-
chants were the kings,
Where St. Mark's is, where the Doges used to wed
the sea with rings?

III.

Ay, because the sea's the street there; and 'tis arched
by . . . what you call
. . . Shylock's bridge with houses on it, where they
kept the carnival!
I was never out of England—it's as if I saw it all!

IV.

Did young people take their pleasure when the sea
was warm in May?
Balls and masks begun at midnight, burning ever to
mid-day,
When they made up fresh adventures for the morrow,
do you say?

V.

Was a lady such a lady, cheeks so round and lips so
red,—
On her neck the small face buoyant, like a bell-flower
on its bed,
O'er the breast's superb abundance where a man might
base his head?

A TOCCATA OF GALUPPI'S

VI.

Well (and it was graceful of them) they'd break talk
off and afford
—She, to bite her mask's black velvet, he to finger on
his sword,
While you sat and played Toccatas, stately at the
clavichord?

VII.

What? Those lesser thirds so plaintive, sixths dimin-
ished, sigh on sigh,
Told them something? Those suspensions, those
solutions—"Must we die?"
Those commiserating sevenths—"Life might last! we
can but try!"

VIII.

"Were you happy?"—"Yes."—"And are you still as
happy?"—"Yes—And you?"
—"Then more kisses"—"Did *I* stop them, when a
million seemed so few?"
Hark—the dominant's persistence, till it must be an-
swered to!

IX.

So an octave struck the answer. Oh, they praised
you, I dare say!
"Brave Galuppi! that was music! good alike at grave
and gay!
I can always leave off talking, when I hear a master
play."

X.

Then they left you for their pleasure: till in due time,
one by one,
Some with lives that came to nothing, some with
deeds as well undone,
Death came tacitly and took them where they never
see the sun.

MEN AND WOMEN

XI.

But when I sit down to reason,—think to take my
stand nor swerve
Till I triumph o'er a secret wrung from nature's close
reserve,
In you come with your cold music, till I creep thro'
every nerve,

XII.

Yes, you, like a ghostly cricket, creaking where a
house was burned—
“Dust and ashes, dead and done with, Venice spent
what Venice earned!
The soul, doubtless, is immortal—where a soul can be
discerned.

XIII.

“Yours for instance, you know physics, something of
geology,
Mathematics are your pastime; souls shall rise in
their degree;
Butterflies may dread extinction,—you'll not die, it
cannot be!

XIV.

“As for Venice and its people, merely born to bloom
and drop,
Here on earth they bore their fruitage, mirth and
folly were the crop.
What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing
had to stop?

XV.

“Dust and ashes!” So you creak it, and I want the
heart to scold.
Dear dead women, with such hair, too—what's become
of all the gold
Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I feel chilly
and grown old.

BY THE FIRE-SIDE

BY THE FIRE-SIDE

I.

How well I know what I mean to do

When the long dark Autumn evenings come,
And where, my soul, is thy pleasant hue?

With the music of all thy voices, dumb
In life's November too!

II.

I shall be found by the fire, suppose,

O'er a great wise book as beseemeth age,
While the shutters flap as the cross-wind blows,
And I turn the page, and I turn the page,
Not verse now, only prose!

III.

Till the young ones whisper, finger on lip,

"There he is at it, deep in Greek—

Now or never, then, out we slip

To cut from the hazels by the creek
A mainmast for our ship."

IV.

I shall be at it indeed, my friends!

Greek puts already on either side
Such a branch-work forth, as soon extends
To a vista opening far and wide,
And I pass out where it ends.

V.

The outside-frame like your hazel-trees—

But the inside-archway narrows fast,
And a rarer sort succeeds to these,

And we slope to Italy at last
And youth, by green degrees.

MEN AND WOMEN

VI.

I follow wherever I am led,
Knowing so well the leader's hand—
Oh, woman-country, wooed, not wed,
Loved all the more by earth's male-lands,
Laid to their hearts instead!

VII.

Look at the ruined chapel again
Half way up in the Alpine gorge.
Is that a tower, I point you plain,
Or is it a mill or an iron forge
Breaks solitude in vain?

VIII.

A turn, and we stand in the heart of things;
The woods are round us, heaped and dim;
From slab to slab how it slips and springs,
The thread of water single and slim,
Thro' the ravage some torrent brings!

IX.

Does it feed the little lake below?
That speck of white just on its marge
Is Pella; see, in the evening glow
How sharp the silver spear-heads charge
When Alp meets Heaven in snow.

X.

On our other side is the straight-up rock;
And a path is kept 'twixt the gorge and it
By boulder-stones where lichens mock
The marks on a moth, and small ferns fit
Their teeth to the polished block.

XI.

Oh, the sense of the yellow mountain flowers,
And the thorny balls, each three in one,
The chestnuts throw on our path in showers,
For the drop of the woodland fruit's begun
These early November hours—

BY THE FIRE-SIDE

XII.

That crimson the creeper's leaf across
Like a splash of blood, intense, abrupt,
O'er a shield, else gold from rim to boss,
And lay it for show on the fairy-cupped
Elf-needed mat of moss,

XIII.

By the rose-flesh mushrooms, undivulged
Last evening—nay, in to-day's first dew
Yon sudden coral nipple bulged
Where a freaked, fawn-coloured, flaky crew
Of toad-stools peep indulged.

XIV.

And yonder, at foot of the fronting ridge
That takes the turn to a range beyond,
Is the chapel reached by the one-arched bridge
Where the water is stopped in a stagnant pond
Danced over by the midge.

XV.

The chapel and bridge are of stone alike,
Blackish grey and mostly wet;
Cut hemp-stalks steep in the narrow dyke.
See here again, how the lichens fret
And the roots of the ivy strike!

XVI.

Poor little place, where its one priest comes
On a festa-day, if he comes at all,
To the dozen folk from their scattered homes,
Gathered within that precinct small
By the dozen ways one roams

XVII.

To drop from the charcoal-burners' huts,
Or climb from the hemp-dressers' low shed,
Leave the grange where the woodman stores his nuts,
Or the wattled cote where the fowlers spread
Their gear on the rock's bare juts.

MEN AND WOMEN

XVIII.

It has some pretension too, this front,
With its bit of fresco half-moon-wise
Set over the porch, art's early wont—
'Tis John in the Desert, I surmise,
But has borne the weather's brunt—

XIX.

Not from the fault of the builder, though,
For a pent-house properly projects
Where three carved beams make a certain show,
Dating—good thought of our architect's—
'Five, six, nine, he lets you know.

XX.

And all day long a bird sings there,
And a stray sheep drinks at the pond at times:
The place is silent and aware;
It has had its scenes, its joys and crimes,
But that is its own affair.

XXI.

My perfect wife, my Leonor,
Oh, heart my own, oh, eyes, mine too,
Whom else could I dare look backward for,
With whom beside should I dare pursue
The path grey heads abhor?

XXII.

For it leads to a crag's sheer edge with them;
Youth, flowery all the way, there stops—
Not they; age threatens and they contemn,
Till they reach the gulf wherein youth drops,
One inch from our life's safe hem!

XXIII.

With me, youth led—I will speak now,
No longer watch you as you sit
Reading by fire-light, that great brow
And the spirit-small hand propping it
Mutely—my heart knows how—

BY THE FIRE-SIDE

XXIV.

When, if I think but deep enough,
You are wont to answer, prompt as rhyme;
And you, too, find without a rebuff
The response your soul seeks many a time
Piercing its fine flesh-stuff—

XXV.

My own, confirm me! If I tread
This path back, is it not in pride
To think how little I dreamed it led
To an age so blest that by its side
Youth seems the waste instead!

XXVI.

My own, see where the years conduct!
At first, 'twas something our two souls
Should mix as mists do: each is sucked
Into each now; on, the new stream rolls,
Whatever rocks obstruct.

XXVII.

Think, when our one soul understands
The great Word which makes all things new—
When earth breaks up and Heaven expands—
How will the change strike me and you
In the House not made with hands?

XXVIII.

Oh, I must feel your brain prompt mine.
Your heart anticipate my heart,
You must be just before, in fine,
See and make me see, for your part,
New depths of the Divine!

XXIX.

But who could have expected this,
When we two drew together first
Just for the obvious human bliss,
To satisfy life's daily thirst
With a thing men seldom miss?

MEN AND WOMEN

XXX.

Come back with me to the first of all,
Let us lean and love it over again—
Let us now forget and then recall,
Break the rosary in a pearly rain,
And gather what we let fall!

XXXI.

What did I say?—that a small bird sings
All day long, save when a brown pair
Of hawks from the wood float with wide wings
Strained to a bell: 'gainst the noon-day glare
You count the streaks and rings.

XXXII.

But at afternoon or almost eve
'Tis better; then the silence grows
To that degree, you half believe
It must get rid of what it knows,
Its bosom does so heave.

XXXIII.

Hither we walked, then, side by side,
Arm in arm and cheek to cheek,
And still I questioned or replied,
While my heart, convulsed to really speak,
Lay choking in its pride.

XXXIV.

Silent the crumbling bridge we cross,
And pity and praise the chapel sweet,
And care about the fresco's loss,
And wish for our souls a like retreat,
And wonder at the moss.

XXXV.

Stoop and kneel on the settle under—
Look through the window's grated square:
Nothing to see! for fear of plunder,
The cross is down and the altar bare,
As if thieves don't fear thunder.

BY THE FIRE-SIDE

XXXVI.

We stoop and look in through the grate,
See the little porch and rustic door,
Read duly the dead builder's date,
Then cross the bridge we crossed before,
Take the path again—but wait!

XXXVII.

Oh moment, one and infinite!
The water slips o'er stock and stone;
The west is tender, hardly bright.
How grey at once is the evening grown—
One star, the chrysolite!

XXXVIII.

We two stood there with never a third,
But each by each, as each knew well.
The sights we saw and the sounds we heard,
The lights and the shades made up a spell
Till the trouble grew and stirred.

XXXIX.

Oh, the little more, and how much it is!
And the little less, and what worlds away!
How a sound shall quicken content to bliss,
Or a breath suspend the blood's best play,
And life be a proof of this!

XL.

Had she willed it, still had stood the screen
So slight, so sure, 'twixt my love and her.
I could fix her face with a guard between,
And find her soul as when friends confer,
Friends—lovers that might have been.

XLI.

For my heart had a touch of the woodland time,
Wanting to sleep now over its best.
Shake the whole tree in the summer-prime,
But bring to the last leaf no such test.
"Hold the last fast!" says the rhyme.

MEN AND WOMEN

XLII.

For a chance to make your little much,
To gain a lover and lose a friend,
Venture the tree and a myriad such,
When nothing you mar but the year can mend!
But a last leaf—fear to touch.

XLIII.

Yet should it unfasten itself and fall
Eddying down till it find your face
At some slight wind—(best chance of all!)
Be your heart henceforth its dwelling-place
You trembled to forestall!

XLIV.

Worth how well, those dark grey eyes,
—That hair so dark and dear, how worth
That a man should strive and agonise,
And taste a very hell on earth
For the hope of such a prize!

XLV.

Oh, you might have turned and tried a man,
Set him a space to weary and wear,
And prove which suited more your plan,
His best of hope or his worst despair,
Yet end as he began.

XLVI.

But you spared me this, like the heart you are,
And filled my empty heart at a word.
If you join two lives, there is oft a scar,
They are one and one, with a shadowy third;
One near one is too far.

XLVII.

A moment after, and hands unseen
Were hanging the night around us fast.
But we knew that a bar was broken between
Life and life; we were mixed at last
In spite of the mortal screen.

BY THE FIRE-SIDE

XLVIII.

The forests had done it ; there they stood—

We caught for a second the powers at play :
They had mingled us so, for once and for good,

Their work was done—we might go or stay,
They relapsed to their ancient mood.

XLIX.

How the world is made for each of us !

How all we perceive and know in it
Tends to some moment's product thus,

When a soul declares itself—to wit,
By its fruit—the thing it does !

L.

Be Hate that fruit or Love that fruit,

It forwards the General Deed of Man,
And each of the Many helps to recruit

The life of the race by a general plan,
Each living his own, to boot.

LI.

I am named and known by that hour's feat,

There took my station and degree.
So grew my own small life complete

As nature obtained her best of me—
One born to love you, sweet !

LII.

And to watch you sink by the fire-side now

Back again, as you mutely sit

Musing by fire-light, that great brow

And the spirit-small hand propping it
Yonder, my heart knows how !

LIII.

So the earth has gained by one man more,

And the gain of earth must be Heaven's gain too,
And the whole is well worth thinking o'er

When the autumn comes: which I mean to do
One day, as I said before.

MEN AND WOMEN

ANY WIFE TO ANY HUSBAND

I.

MY love, this is the bitterest, that thou
Who art all truth and who dost love me now
As thine eyes say, as thy voice breaks to say—
Should'st love so truly and could'st love me still
A whole long life through, had but love its will,
Would death that leads me from thee brook delay!

II.

I have but to be by thee, and thy hand
Would never let mine go, thy heart withstand
The beating of my heart to reach its place.
When should I look for thee and feel thee gone?
When cry for the old comfort and find none?
Never, I know! Thy soul is in thy face.

III.

Oh, I should fade—'tis willed so! might I save,
Gladly I would, whatever beauty gave
Joy to thy sense, for that was precious too.
It is not to be granted. But the soul
Whence the love comes, all ravage leaves that whole;
Vainly the flesh fades—soul makes all things new.

IV.

And 'twould not be because my eye grew dim
Thou could'st not find the love there, thanks to Him
Who never is dishonoured in the spark
He gave us from his fire of fires, and bade
Remember whence it sprang nor be afraid
While that burns on, though all the rest grow dark.

V.

So, how thou would'st be perfect, white and clean
Outside as inside, soul and soul's demesne
Alike, this body given to show it by!

ANY WIFE TO ANY HUSBAND

Oh, three-parts through the worst of life's abyss,
What plaudits from the next world after this,
Could'st thou repeat a stroke and gain the sky!

VI.

And is it not the bitterer to think
That, disengage our hands and thou wilt sink
Although thy love was love in very deed?
I know that nature! Pass a festive day
Thou dost not throw its relic-flower away
Nor bid its music's loitering echo speed.

VII.

Thou let'st the stranger's glove lie where it fell;
If old things remain old things all is well,
For thou art grateful as becomes man best:
And hadst thou only heard me play one tune,
Or viewed me from a window, not so soon
With thee would such things fade as with the rest.

VIII.

I seem to see! we meet and part: 'tis brief:
The book I opened keeps a folded leaf,
The very chair I sat on, breaks the rank;
That is a portrait of me on the wall—
Three lines, my face comes at so slight a call;
And for all this, one little hour's to thank.

IX.

But now, because the hour through years was fixed,
Because our inmost beings met and mixed,
Because thou once hast loved me—wilt thou dare
Say to thy soul and Who may list beside,
'Therefore she is immortally my bride,
Chance cannot change that love, nor time impair.

X.

'So, what if in the dusk of life that's left,
, a tired traveller, of my sun bereft,
Look from my path when, mimicking the same,

MEN AND WOMEN

The fire-fly glimpses past me, come and gone?
—Where was it till the sunset? where anon
It will be at the sunrise! what's to blame?"

XI.

Is it so helpful to thee? canst thou take
The mimic up, nor, for the true thing's sake,
Put gently by such efforts at a beam?
Is the remainder of the way so long
Thou need'st the little solace, thou the strong?
Watch out thy watch, let weak ones doze and
dream!

XII.

"—Ah, but the fresher faces! Is it true,"
Thou'lt ask, "some eyes are beautiful and new?
Some hair,—how can one choose but grasp such
wealth?
And if a man would press his lips to lips
Fresh as the wilding hedge-rose-cup there slips
The dew-drop out of, must it be by stealth?"

XIII.

"It cannot change the love kept still for Her,
Much more than, such a picture to prefer
Passing a day with, to a room's bare side.
The painted form takes nothing she possessed,
Yet while the Titian's Venus lies at rest
A man looks. Once more, what is there to chide?"

XIV.

So must I see, from where I sit and watch,
My own self sell myself, my hand attach
Its warrant to the very thefts from me—
Thy singleness of soul that made me proud,
Thy purity of heart I loved aloud,
Thy man's truth I was bold to bid God see!

XV.

Love so, then, if thou wilt! Give all thou canst
Away to the new faces—disentranced—

ANY WIFE TO ANY HUSBAND

(Say it and think it) obdurate no more,
Re-issue looks and words from the old mint—
Pass them afresh, no matter whose the print
Image and superscription once they bore!

XVI.

Re-coin thyself and give it them to spend,—
It all comes to the same thing at the end,
Since mine thou wast, mine art, and mine shalt be,
Faithful or faithless, sealing up the sum
Or lavish of my treasure, thou must come
Back to the heart's place here I keep for thee!

XVII.

Only, why should it be with stain at all?
Why must I, 'twixt the leaves of coronal,
Put any kiss of pardon on thy brow?
Why need the other women know so much
And talk together, "Such the look and such
The smile he used to love with, then as now!"

XVIII.

Might I die last and shew thee! Should I find
Such hardship in the few years left behind,
If free to take and light my lamp, and go
Into thy tomb, and shut the door and sit
Seeing thy face on those four sides of it
The better that they are so blank, I know!

XIX.

Why, time was what I wanted, to turn o'er
Within my mind each look, get more and more
By heart each word, too much to learn at first,
And join thee all the fitter for the pause
'Neath the low door-way's lintel. That were cause
For lingering, though thou calledst, if I durst!

XX.

And yet thou art the nobler of us two.
What dare I dream of, that thou canst not do,

MEN AND WOMEN

Outstripping my ten small steps with one stride?
I'll say then, here's a trial and a task—
Is it to bear?—if easy, I'll not ask—
Though love fail, I can trust on in thy pride.

XXI.

Pride?—when those eyes forestal the life behind
The death I have to go through!—when I find,
Now that I want thy help most, all of thee!
What did I fear? Thy love shall hold me fast
Until the little minute's sleep is past
And I wake saved.—And yet, it will not be!

AN EPISTLE

CONTAINING THE STRANGE MEDICAL EXPERIENCE OF
KARSHISH, THE ARAB PHYSICIAN

KARSHISH, the picker-up of learning's crumbs,
The not-incurious in God's handiwork
(This man's-flesh He hath admirably made,
Blown like a bubble, kneaded like a paste,
To coop up and keep down on earth a space
That puff of vapour from his mouth, man's soul)
—To Abib, all-sagacious in our art,
Breeder in me of what poor skill I boast,
Like me inquisitive how pricks and cracks
Befall the flesh through too much stress and strain,
Whereby the wily vapour fain would slip
Back and rejoin its source before the term,—
And aptest in contrivance, under God,
To baffle it by deftly stopping such:—
The vagrant Scholar to his Sage at home
Sends greeting (health and knowledge, fame with
peace),
Three samples of true snake-stone—rarer still,
One of the other sort, the melon-shaped,

AN EPISTLE

(But fitter, pounded fine, for charms than drugs)
And writeth now the twenty-second time.

My journeyings were brought to Jericho,
Thus I resume. Who studious in our art
Shall count a little labour unpaid?
I have shed sweat enough, left flesh and bone
On many a flinty furlong of this land.
Also the country-side is all on fire
With rumours of a marching hitherward—
Some say Vespasian cometh, some, his son.
A black lynx snarled and pricked a tufted ear;
Lust of my blood inflamed his yellow balls:
I cried and threw my staff and he was gone.
Twice have the robbers stripped and beaten me,
And once a town declared me for a spy,
But at the end, I reach Jerusalem,
Since this poor covert where I pass the night,
This Bethany, lies scarce the distance thence
A man with plague-sores at the third degree
Runs till he drops down dead. Thou laughest here!
'Sooth, it elates me, thus reposed and safe,
To void the stuffing of my travel-scrip
And share with thee whatever Jewry yields.
A viscid choler is observable
In tertians, I was nearly bold to say,
And falling-sickness hath a happier cure
Than our school wots of: there's a spider here
Weaves no web, watches on the ledge of tombs,
Sprinkled with mottles on an ash-grey back;
Take five and drop them . . . but who knows his
mind,
The Syrian run-a-gate I trust this to?
His service payeth me a sublimate
Blown up his nose to help the ailing eye.
Best wait: I reach Jerusalem at morn,
There set in order my experiences,
Gather what most deserves and give thee all—
Or I might add, Judea's gum-tragacanth
Scales off in purer flakes, shines clearer-grained,

MEN AND WOMEN

Cracks 'twixt the pestle and the porphyry,
In fine exceeds our produce. Scalp-disease
Confounds me, crossing so with leprosy—
Thou hadst admired one sort I gained at Zoar—
But zeal outruns discretion. Here I end.

Yet stay : my Syrian blinketh gratefully,
Protesteth his devotion is my price—
Suppose I write what harms not, though he steal?
I half resolve to tell thee, yet I blush,
What set me off a-writing first of all.
An itch I had, a sting to write, a tang !
For, be it this town's barrenness—or else
The Man had something in the look of him—
His case has struck me far more than 'tis worth.
So, pardon if—(lest presently I lose
In the great press of novelty at hand
The care and pains this somehow stole from me)
I bid thee take the thing while fresh in mind,
Almost in sight—for, wilt thou have the truth?
The very man is gone from me but now,
Whose ailment is the subject of discourse.
Thus then, and let thy better wit help all.

'Tis but a case of mania—subinduced
By epilepsy, at the turning-point
Of trance prolonged unduly some three days,
When by the exhibition of some drug
Or spell, exorcisation, stroke of art
Unknown to me and which 'twere well to know,
The evil thing out-breaking all at once
Left the man whole and sound of body indeed,—
But, flinging, so to speak, life's gates too wide,
Making a clear house of it too suddenly,
The first conceit that entered pleased to write
Whatever it was minded on the wall
So plainly at that vantage, as it were,
(First come, first served) that nothing subsequent
Attaineth to erase the fancy-scrawls
Which the returned and new-established soul

AN EPISTLE

Hath gotten now so thoroughly by heart
That henceforth she will read or these or none.
And first—the man's own firm conviction rests
That he was dead (in fact they buried him)
That he was dead and then restored to life
By a Nazarene physician of his tribe :
—'Sayeth, the same bade "Rise," and he did rise.
"Such cases are diurnal," thou wilt cry.
Not so this figment!—not, that such a fume,
Instead of giving way to time and health,
Should eat itself into the life of life,
As saffron tingeth flesh, blood, bones and all!
For see, how he takes up the after-life.
The man—it is one Lazarus a Jew,
Sanguine, proportioned, fifty years of age,
The body's habit wholly laudable,
As much, indeed, beyond the common health
As he were made and put aside to show.
Think, could we penetrate by any drug
And bathe the wearied soul and worried flesh,
And bring it clear and fair, by three days sleep!
Whence has the man the balm that brightens all?
This grown man eyes the world now like a child.
Some elders of his tribe, I should premise,
Led in their friend, obedient as a sheep,
To bear my inquisition. While they spoke,
Now sharply, now with sorrow,—told the case,—
He listened not except I spoke to him,
But folded his two hands and let them talk,
Watching the flies that buzzed : and yet no fool.
And that's a sample how his years must go.
Look if a beggar, in fixed middle-life,
Should find a treasure, can he use the same
With straightened habits and with tastes starved
small,
And take at once to his impoverished brain
The sudden element that changes things,
—That sets the undreamed-of rapture at his hand,
And puts the cheap old joy in the scorned dust?
Is he not such an one as moves to mirth—

MEN AND WOMEN

Warily parsimonious, when's no need,
Wasteful as drunkenness at undue times?
All prudent counsel as to what befits
The golden mean, is lost on such an one.
The man's fantastic will is the man's law.
So here—we'll call the treasure knowledge, say—
Increased beyond the fleshy faculty—
Heaven opened to a soul while yet on earth,
Earth forced on a soul's use while seeing Heaven.
The man is witless of the size, the sum,
The value in proportion of all things,
Or whether it be little or be much.
Discourse to him of prodigious armaments
Assembled to besiege his city now,
And of the passing of a mule with gourds—
'Tis one! Then take it on the other side,
Speak of some trifling fact—he will gaze rapt
With stupor at its very littleness—
(Far as I see) as if in that indeed
He caught prodigious import, whole results;
And so will turn to us the bystanders
In ever the same stupor (note this point)
That we too see not with his opened eyes!
Wonder and doubt come wrongly into play,
Preposterously, at cross purposes.
Should his child sicken unto death,—why, look
For scarce abatement of his cheerfulness,
Or pretermission of his daily craft—
While a word, gesture, glance, from that same child
At play or in the school or laid asleep,
Will start him to an agony of fear,
Exasperation, just as like! demand
The reason why—" 'tis but a word," object—
"A gesture"—he regards thee as our lord
Who lived there in the pyramid alone,
Looked at us, dost thou mind, when being young
We both would unadvisedly recite
Some charm's beginning, from that book of his,
Able to bid the sun throb wide and burst
All into stars, as suns grown old are wont.

AN EPISTLE

Thou and the child have each a veil alike
Thrown o'er your heads from under which ye both
Stretch your blind hands and trifle with a match
Over a mine of Greek fire, did ye know!
He holds on firmly to some thread of life—
(It is the life to lead perforcedly)
Which runs across some vast distracting orb
Of glory on either side that meagre thread,
Which, conscious of, he must not enter yet—
The spiritual life around the earthly life!
The law of that is known to him as this—
His heart and brain move there, his feet stay here.
So is the man perplexed with impulses
Sudden to start off crosswise, not straight on,
Proclaiming what is Right and Wrong across—
And not along—this black thread through the blaze—
“It should be” balked by “here it cannot be.”
And oft the man's soul springs into his face
As if he saw again and heard again
His sage that bade him “Rise” and he did rise.
Something—a word, a tick of the blood within
Admonishes—then back he sinks at once
To ashes, that was very fire before,
In sedulous recurrence to his trade
Whereby he earneth him the daily bread—
And studiously the humbler for that pride,
Professedly the faultier that he knows
God's secret, while he holds the thread of life.
Indeed the especial marking of the man
Is prone submission to the Heavenly will—
Seeing it, what it is, and why it is.
'Sayeth, he will wait patient to the last
For that same death which will restore his being
To equilibrium, body loosening soul
Divorced even now by premature full growth:
He will live, nay, it pleaseth him to live
So long as God please, and just how God please.
He even seeketh not to please God more
(Which meaneth, otherwise) than as God please.
Hence I perceive not he affects to preach

MEN AND WOMEN

The doctrine of his sect whate'er it be—
Make proselytes as madmen thirst to do.
How can he give his neighbour the real ground,
His own conviction? ardent as he is—
Call his great truth a lie, why still the old
"Be it as God please" reassureth him.
I probed the sore as thy disciple should—
"How, beast," said I, "this stolid carelessness
Sufficeth thee, when Rome is on her march
To stamp out like a little spark thy town,
Thy tribe, thy crazy tale and thee at once?"
He merely looked with his large eyes on me.
The man is apathetic, you deduce?
Contrariwise he loves both old and young,
Able and weak—affects the very brutes
And birds—how say I? flowers of the field—
As a wise workman recognises tools
In a master's workshop, loving what they make.
Thus is the man as harmless as a lamb:
Only impatient, let him do his best,
At ignorance and carelessness and sin—
An indignation which is promptly curbed.
As when in certain travels I have feigned
To be an ignoramus in our art
According to some preconceived design,
And happed to hear the land's practitioners
Steeped in conceit sublimed by ignorance,
Prattle fantastically on disease,
Its cause and cure—and I must hold my peace!

Thou wilt object—why have I not ere this
Sought out the sage himself, the Nazarene
Who wrought this cure, enquiring at the source,
Conferring with the frankness that befits?
Alas! it grieveth me, the learned leech
Perished in a tumult many years ago,
Accused,—our learning's fate,—of wizardry.
Rebellion, to the setting up a rule
And creed prodigious as described to me.
His death which happened when the earthquake fell

AN EPISTLE

(Prefiguring, as soon appeared, the loss
To occult learning in our lord the sage
That lived there in the pyramid alone)
Was wrought by the mad people—that's their wont—
On vain recourse, as I conjecture it,
To his tried virtue, for miraculous help—
How could he stop the earthquake? That's their way!
The other imputations must be lies:
But take one—though I loathe to give it thee,
In mere respect to any good man's fame!
(And after all our patient Lazarus
Is stark mad—should we count on what he says?
Perhaps not—though in writing to a leech
'Tis well to keep back nothing of a case.)
This man so cured regards the curer then,
As—God forgive me—who but God himself,
Creator and Sustainer of the world,
That came and dwelt in flesh on it awhile!
—'Sayeth that such an One was born and lived,
Taught, healed the sick, broke bread at his own house,
Then died, with Lazarus by, for ought I know,
And yet was . . . what I said nor choose repeat,
And must have so avouched himself, in fact,
In hearing of this very Lazarus
Who saith—but why all this of what he saith?
Why write of trivial matters, things of price
Calling at every moment for remark?
I noticed on the margin of a pool
Blue-flowering borage, the Aleppo sort,
Aboundeth, very nitrous. It is strange!

Thy pardon for this long and tedious case,
Which, now that I review it, needs must seem
Unduly dwelt on, proluxly set forth.
Nor I myself discern in what is writ
Good cause for the peculiar interest
And awe indeed this man has touched me with.
Perhaps the journey's end, the weariness
Had wrought upon me first. I met him thus—
I crossed a ridge of short sharp broken hills

MEN AND WOMEN

Like an old lion's cheek-teeth. Out there came
A moon made like a face with certain spots
Multiform, manifold, and menacing:
Then a wind rose behind me. So we met
In this old sleepy town at unaware,
The man and I. I send thee what is writ.
Regard it as a chance, a matter risked
To this ambiguous Syrian—he may lose,
Or steal, or give it thee with equal good.
Jerusalem's repose shall make amends
For time this letter wastes, thy time and mine,
Till when, once more thy pardon and farewell!

The very God! think, Abib; dost thou think?
So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too—
So, through the thunder comes a human voice
Saying, "O heart I made, a heart beats here!
Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself.
Thou hast no power nor may'st conceive of mine,
But love I gave thee, with Myself to love,
And thou must love me who have died for thee!"
The madman saith He said so: it is strange.

MESMERISM

I.

ALL I believed is true!
I am able yet
All I want to get
By a method as strange as new:
Dare I trust the same to you?

II.

If at night, when the doors are shut,
And the wood-worm picks,
And the death-watch ticks,
And the bar has a flag of smut,
And a cat's in the water-butt—

MESMERISM

III.

And the socket floats and flares,
And the house-beams groan,
And a foot unknown
Is surmised on the garret-stairs,
And the locks slip unawares—

IV.

And the spider, to serve his ends,
By a sudden thread,
Arms and legs outspread,
On the table's midst descends,
Comes to find, God knows what friends!—

V.

If since eve drew in, I say,
I have sate and brought
(So to speak) my thought
To bear on the woman away,
Till I felt my hair turn grey—

VI.

Till I seemed to have and hold
In the vacancy
'Twixt the wall and me,
From the hair-plait's chestnut gold
To the foot in its muslin fold—

VII.

Have and hold, then and there,
Her, from head to foot,
Breathing and mute,
Passive and yet aware,
In the grasp of my steady stare—

VIII.

Hold and have, there and then,
All her body and soul
That completes my Whole,
All that women add to men,
In the clutch of my steady ken—

MEN AND WOMEN

IX.

Having and holding, till
I imprint her fast
On the void at last
As the sun does whom he will
By the calotypist's skill—

X.

Then,—if my heart's strength serve
And through all and each
Of the veils I reach
To her soul and never swerve,
Knitting an iron nerve—

XI.

Commanding that to advance
And inform the shape
Which has made escape
And before my countenance
Answers me glance for glance—

XII.

I, still with a gesture fit
Of my hands that best
Do my soul's behest,
Pointing the power from it,
While myself do steadfast sit—

XIII.

Steadfast and still the same
On my object bent
While the hands give vent
To my ardour and my aim
And break into very flame—

XIV.

Then, I reach, I must believe,
Not her soul in vain,
For to me again
It reaches, and past retrieve
Is wound in the toils I weave—

MESMERISM

XV.

And must follow as I require
As befits a thrall,
Bringing flesh and all,
Essence and earth-attire,
To the source of the tractile fire—

XVI.

Till the house called hers, not mine,
With a growing weight
Seems to suffocate
If she break not its leaden line
And escape from its close confine—

XVII.

Out of doors into the night!
On to the maze
Of the wild wood-ways,
Not turning to left or right
From the pathway, blind with sight—

XVIII.

Making thro' rain and wind
O'er the broken shrubs,
'Twixt the stems and stubs,
With a still composed strong mind,
Not a care for the world behind—

XIX.

Swifter and still more swift,
As the crowding peace
Doth to joy increase
In the wide blind eyes uplift,
Thro' the darkness and the drift!

XX.

While I—to the shape, I too
Feel my soul dilate
Nor a whit abate
And relax not a gesture due
As I see my belief come true—

MEN AND WOMEN

XXI.

For there ! have I drawn or no
Life to that lip?
Do my fingers dip
In a flame which again they throw
On the cheek that breaks a-glow ?

XXII.

Ha ! was the hair so first ?
What, unfileted,
Made alive, and spread
Through the void with a rich outburst,
Chestnut gold-interspersed !

XXIII.

Like the doors of a casket-shrine,
See, on either side,
Her two arms divide
Till the heart betwixt makes sign,
Take me, for I am thine !

XXIV.

Now—now—the door is heard
Hark ! the stairs and near—
Nearer—and here—
Now ! and at call the third
She enters without a word.

XXV.

On doth she march and on
To the fancied shape—
It is past escape
Herself, now—the dream is done
And the shadow and she are one.

XXVI.

First I will pray. Do Thou
That ownest the soul,
Yet wilt grant controul
To another nor disallow
For a time, restrain me now !

A SERENADE AT THE VILLA

XXVII.

I admonish me while I may,
Not to squander guilt,
Since require Thou wilt
At my hand its price one day!
What the price is, who can say?

A SERENADE AT THE VILLA

I.

THAT was I, you heard last night
When there rose no moon at all,
Nor, to pierce the strained and tight
Tent of heaven, a planet small:
Life was dead, and so was light.

II.

Not a twinkle from the fly,
Not a glimmer from the worm.
When the crickets stopped their cry,
When the owls forbore a term,
You heard music; that was I.

III.

Earth turned in her sleep with pain,
Sultrily suspired for proof:
In at heaven and out again,
Lightning!—where it broke the roof,
Bloodlike, some few drops of rain.

IV.

What they could my words expressed,
O my love, my all, my one!
Singing helped the verses best,
And when singing's best was done,
To my lute I left the rest.

MEN AND WOMEN

V.

So wore night ; the east was grey,
White the broad-faced hemlock flowers ;
Soon would come another day ;
Ere its first of heavy hours
Found me, I had past away.

VI.

What became of all the hopes,
Words and song and lute as well ?
Say, this struck you—"When life gropes
Feebly for the path where fell
Light last on the evening slopes,

VII.

"One friend in that path shall be
To secure my steps from wrong ;
One to count night day for me,
Patient through the watches long,
Serving most with none to see."

VIII.

Never say—as something bodes—
"So the worst has yet a worse !
When life halts 'neath double loads,
Better the task-master's curse
Than such music on the roads !

IX.

"When no moon succeeds the sun,
Nor can pierce the midnight's tent
Any star, the smallest one,
While some drops, where lightning went,
Show the final storm begun—

X.

"When the fire-fly hides its spot,
When the garden-voices fail
In the darkness thick and hot,—
Shall another voice avail,
That shape be where those are not ?

INSTANS TYRANNUS

XI.

“Has some plague a longer lease
Proffering its help uncouth?
Can't one even die in peace?
As one shuts one's eyes on youth,
Is that face the last one sees?”

XII.

Oh, how dark your villa was,
Windows fast and obdurate!
How the garden grudged me grass
Where I stood—the iron gate
Ground its teeth to let me pass!

MY STAR

ALL that I know
Of a certain star,
Is, it can throw
(Like the angled spar)
Now a dart of red,
Now a dart of blue,
Till my friends have said
They would fain see, too,

My star that dartles the red and the blue!
Then it stops like a bird,—like a flower, hangs furled;
They must solace themselves with the Saturn above it.
What matter to me if their star is a world?
Mine has opened its soul to me; therefore I love it.

INSTANS TYRANNUS

I.

OF the million or two, more or less,
I rule and possess,
One man, for some cause undefined,
Was least to my mind.

MEN AND WOMEN

II.

I struck him, he grovelled of course—
For, what was his force?
I pinned him to earth with my weight
And persistence of hate—
And he lay, would not moan, would not curse,
As if lots might be worse.

III.

“Were the object less mean, would he stand
At the swing of my hand!
For obscurity helps him and blots
The hole where he squats.”
So I set my five wits on the stretch
To inveigle the wretch.
All in vain! gold and jewels I threw,
Still he couched there perdue.
I tempted his blood and his flesh,
Hid in roses my mesh,
Choicest cates and the flagon’s best spilth—
Still he kept to his filth!

IV.

Had he kith now or kin, were access
To his heart, if I press—
Just a son or a mother to seize—
No such booty as these!
Were it simply a friend to pursue
’Mid my million or two,
Who could pay me in person or pelf
What he owes me himself.
No! I could not but smile through my chafe—
For the fellow lay safe
As his mates do, the midge and the nit,
—Through minuteness, to wit.
Then a humour more great took its place
At the thought of his face,
The droop, the low cares of the mouth,
The trouble uncouth

INSTANS TYRANNUS

'Twixt the brows, all that air one is fain
To put out of its pain—
And, no, I admonished myself,
“Is one mocked by an elf,
Is one baffled by toad or by rat?
The gravamen's in that!
How the lion, who crouches to suit
His back to my foot,
Would admire that I stand in debate!
But the Small is the Great
If it vexes you,—that is the thing!
Toad or rat vex the King?
Though I waste half my realm to unearth
Toad or rat, 'tis well worth!”

VI.

So I soberly laid my last plan
To extinguish the man.
Round his creep-hole,—with never a break
Ran my fires for his sake;
Over-head, did my thunders combine
With my under-ground mine:
Till I looked from my labour content
To enjoy the event.

VII.

When sudden . . . how think ye, the end?
Did I say “without friend?”
Say rather, from marge to blue marge
The whole sky grew his targe
With the sun's self for visible boss,
While an Arm ran across
Which the earth heaved beneath like a breast
Where the wretch was safe prest!
Do you see? just my vengeance complete,
The man sprang to his feet,
Stood erect, caught at God's skirts and prayed!
—So, *I* was afraid!

MEN AND WOMEN

A PRETTY WOMAN

I.

THAT fawn-skin-dappled hair of hers,
And the blue eye
Dear and dewy,
And that infantine fresh air of hers!

II.

To think men cannot take you, Sweet,
And enfold you,
Ay, and hold you,
And so keep you what they make you, Sweet!

III.

You like us for a glance, you know—
For a word's sake,
Or a sword's sake,
All's the same, whate'er the chance, you know.

IV.

And in turn we make you ours, we say—
You and youth too,
Eyes and mouth too,
All the face composed of flowers, we say.

V.

All's our own, to make the most of, Sweet—
Sing and say for,
Watch and pray for,
Keep a secret or go boast of, Sweet.

VI.

But for loving, why, you would not, Sweet,
Though we prayed you,
Paid you, brayed you
In a mortar—for you could not, Sweet.

A PRETTY WOMAN

VII.

So, we leave the sweet face fondly there—
Be its beauty
Its sole duty!
Let all hope of grace beyond, lie there!

VIII.

And while the face lies quiet there,
Who shall wonder
That I ponder
A conclusion? I will try it there.

IX.

As,—why must one, for the love forgone,
Scout mere liking?
Thunder-striking
Earth,—the heaven, we looked above for, gone!

X.

Why with beauty, needs there money be—
Love with liking?
Crush the fly-king
In his gauze, because no honey bee?

XI.

May not liking be so simple-sweet,
If love grew there
'Twould undo there
All that breaks the cheek to dimples sweet?

XII.

Is the creature too imperfect, say?
Would you mend it
And so end it?
Since not all addition perfects aye!

XIII.

Or is it of its kind, perhaps,
Just perfection—

MEN AND WOMEN

Whence, rejection
Of a grace not to its mind, perhaps?

XIV.

Shall we burn up, tread that face at once
 into tinder,
 And so hinder
Sparks from kindling all the place at once?

XV.

Or else kiss away one's soul on her?
 Your love-fancies!—
 A sick man sees
Truer, when his hot eyes roll on her!

XVI.

Thus the craftsman thinks to grace the rose,—
 Plucks a mould-flower
 For his gold flower,
Uses fine things that efface the rose.

XVII.

Rosy rubies make its cup more rose,
 Precious metals
 Ape the petals,—
Last, some old king locks it up, morose!

XVIII.

Then, how grace a rose? I know a way!
 Leave it rather.
 Must you gather?
Smell, kiss, wear it—at last, throw away!

CHILDE ROLAND

"CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME"

(See Edgar's Song in "LEAR")

I.

MY first thought was, he lied in every word,
That hoary cripple, with malicious eye
Askance to watch the working of his lie
On mine, and mouth scarce able to afford
Suppression of the glee that pursed and scored
Its edge at one more victim gained thereby.

II.

What else should he be set for, with his staff?
What, save to waylay with his lies, ensnare
All travellers that might find him posted there,
And ask the road? I guessed what skull-like laugh
Would break, what crutch 'gin write my epitaph
For pastime in the dusty thoroughfare,

III.

If at his counsel I should turn aside
Into that ominous tract which, all agree,
Hides the Dark Tower. Yet acquiescingly
I did turn as he pointed; neither pride
Nor hope rekindling at the end descried,
So much as gladness that some end should be.

IV.

For, what with my whole world-wide wandering,
What with my search drawn out thro' years, my
hope
Dwindled into a ghost not fit to cope
With that obstreperous joy success would bring,-
I hardly tried now to rebuke the spring
My heart made, finding failure in its scope

MEN AND WOMEN

V.

As when a sick man very near to death
Seems dead indeed, and feels begin and end
The tears and takes the farewell of each friend,
And hears one bid the other go, draw breath
Freelier outside, ("since all is o'er," he saith,
"And the blow fall'n no grieving can amend")

VI.

While some discuss if near the other graves
Be room enough for this, and when a day
Suits best for carrying the corpse away,
With care about the banners, scarves and staves,—
And still the man hears all, and only craves
He may not shame such tender love and stay.

VII.

Thus, I had so long suffered in this quest,
Heard failure prophesied so oft, been writ
So many times among "The Band"—to wit,
The knights who to the Dark Tower's search
addressed
Their steps—that just to fail as they, seemed best,
And all the doubt was now—should I be fit.

VIII.

So, quiet as despair, I turned from him,
That hateful cripple, out of his highway
Into the path he pointed. All the day
Had been a dreary one at best, and dim
Was settling to its close, yet shot one grim
Red leer to see the plain catch its estray.

IX.

For mark! no sooner was I fairly found
Pledged to the plain, after a pace or two,
Than pausing to throw backward a last view
To the safe road, 'twas gone! grey plain all round!
Nothing but plain to the horizon's bound.
I might go on; nought else remained to do.

CHILDE ROLAND

X.

So on I went. I think I never saw
Such starved ignoble nature; nothing throve;
For flowers—as well expect a cedar grove!
But cockle, spurge, according to their law
Might propagate their kind, with none to awe,
You'd think: a burr had been a treasure-trove.

XI.

No! penury, inertness, and grimace,
In some strange sort, were the land's portion. "See
Or shut your eyes"—said Nature peevishly—
"It nothing skills: I cannot help my case:
The Judgment's fire alone can cure this place,
Calcine its clods and set my prisoners free."

XII.

If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk
Above its mates, the head was chopped—the bents
Were jealous else. What made those holes and rents
In the dock's harsh swarth leaves—bruised as to baulk
All hope of greenness? 'tis a brute must walk
Pushing their life out, with a brute's intents.

XIII.

As for the grass, it grew as scant as hair
In leprosy—thin dry blades pricked the mud
Which underneath looked kneaded up with blood.
One stiff blind horse, his every bone a-stare,
Stood stupified, however he came there—
Thrust out past service from the devil's stud!

XIV.

Alive? he might be dead for all I know,
With that red gaunt and colloped neck a-strain,
And shut eyes underneath the rusty mane.
Seldom went such grotesqueness with such woe:
I never saw a brute I hated so—
He must be wicked to deserve such pain.

MEN AND WOMEN

XV.

I shut my eyes and turned them on my heart.
As a man calls for wine before he fights,
I asked one draught of earlier, happier sights
Ere fitly I could hope to play my part.
Think first, fight afterwards—the soldier's art :
One taste of the old times sets all to rights !

XVI.

Not it ! I fancied Cuthbert's reddening face
Beneath its garniture of curly gold,
Dear fellow, till I almost felt him fold
An arm in mine to fix me to the place,
That way he used. Alas ! one night's disgrace !
Out went my heart's new fire and left it cold.

XVII.

Giles, then, the soul of honour—there he stands
Frank as ten years ago when knighted first.
What honest men should dare (he said) he durst.
Good—but the scene shifts—faugh ! what hangman's
hands
Pin to his breast a parchment ? his own bands
Read it. Poor traitor, spit upon and curst !

XVIII.

Better this present than a past like that—
Back therefore to my darkening path again.
No sound, no sight as far as eye could strain.
Will the night send a howlet or a bat ?
I asked : when something on the dismal flat
Came to arrest my thoughts and change their
train.

XIX.

A sudden little river crossed my path
As unexpected as a serpent comes.
No sluggish tide congenial to the glooms—
This, as it frothed by, might have been a bath
For the fiend's glowing hoof—to see the wrath
Of its black eddy bespate with flakes and spumes.

CHILDE ROLAND

XX.

So petty yet so spiteful! all along,
Low scrubby alders kneeled down over it.
Drenched willows flung them headlong in a fit
Of mute despair, a suicidal throng:
The river which had done them all the wrong,
Whate'er that was, rolled by, deterred no whit.

XXI.

Which, while I forded,—good saints, how I feared
To set my foot upon a dead man's cheek,
Each step, or feel the spear I thrust to seek
For hollows, tangled in his hair or beard!
—It may have been a water-rat I speared,
But, ugh! it sounded like a baby's shriek.

XXII.

Glad was I when I reached the other bank.
Now for a better country. Vain presage!
Who were the strugglers, what war did they wage
Whose savage trample thus could pad the dank
Soil to a plash? toads in a poisoned tank,
Or wild cats in a red-hot iron cage—

XXIII.

The fight must so have seemed in that fell cirque.
What kept them there, with all the plain to
choose?
No foot-print leading to that horrid mews,
None out of it: mad brewage set to work
Their brains, no doubt, like galley-slaves the Turk
Pits for his pastime, Christians against Jews.

XXIV.

And more than that—a furlong on—why, there!
What bad use was that engine for, that wheel,
Or brake, not wheel— that harrow fit to reel
Men's bodies out like silk? with all the air
Of Tophet's tool, on earth left unaware,
Or brought to sharpen its rusty teeth of steel.

MEN AND WOMEN

XXV.

Then came a bit of stubbed ground, once a wood,
Next a marsh, it would seem, and now mere earth
Desperate and done with; (so a fool finds mirth,
Makes a thing and then mars it, till his mood
Changes and off he goes!) within a rood
Bog, clay and rubble, sand and stark black dearth.

XXVI.

Now blotches rankling, coloured gay and grim,
Now patches where some leanness of the soil's
Broke into moss or substances like boils;
Then came some palsied oak, a cleft in him
Like a distorted mouth that splits its rim
Gaping at death, and dies while it recoils.

XXVII.

And just as far as ever from the end!
Nought in the distance but the evening, nought
To point my footstep further! At the thought,
A great black bird, Apollyon's bosom-friend,
Sailed past, nor beat his wide wing dragon-penned
That brushed my cap—perchance the guide I
sought.

XXVIII.

For looking up, aware I somehow grew,
'Spite of the dusk, the plain had given place
All round to mountains—with such name to grace
Mere ugly heights and heaps now stol'n in view.
How thus they had surprised me,—solve it, you!
How to get from them was no plainer case.

XXIX.

Yet half I seemed to recognise some trick
Of mischief happened to me, God knows when—
In a bad dream perhaps. Here ended, then,
Progress this way. When, in the very nick
Of giving up, one time more, came a click
As when a trap shuts—you're inside the den!

CHILDE ROLAND

XXX.

Burningly it came on me all at once,
This was the place! those two hills on the right
Crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in
fight—
While to the left, a tall scalped mountain . . . Duncce,
Fool, to be dozing at the very nonce,
After a life spent training for the sight!

XXXI.

What in the midst lay but the Tower itself?
The round squat turret, blind as the fool's heart,
Built of brown stone, without a counterpart
In the whole world. The tempest's mocking elf
Points to the shipman thus the unseen shelf
He strikes on, only when the timbers start.

XXXII.

Not see? because of night perhaps?—Why, day
Came back again for that! before it left,
The dying sunset kindled through a cleft:
The hills, like giants at a hunting, lay—
Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay,—
“Now stab and end the creature—to the heft!”

XXXIII.

Not hear? when noise was everywhere? it tolled
Increasing like a bell. Names in my ears,
Of all the lost adventurers my peers,—
How such a one was strong, and such was bold,
And such was fortunate, yet each of old
Lost, lost! one moment knelled the woe of years.

XXXIV.

There they stood, ranged along the hill-sides—met
To view the last of me, a living frame
For one more picture! in a sheet of flame
I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set
And blew. “*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower
came.*”

MEN AND WOMEN

RESPECTABILITY

I.

DEAR, had the world in its caprice
Deigned to proclaim "I know you both,
Have recognised your plighted troth,
Am sponsor for you—live in peace!"—
How many precious months and years
Of youth had passed, that speed so fast,
Before we found it out at last,
The world, and what it fears?

II.

How much of priceless life were spent
With men that every virtue decks,
And women models of their sex,
Society's true ornament,—
Ere we dared wander, nights like this,
Thro' wind and rain, and watch the Seine,
And feel the Boulevart break again
To warmth and light and bliss?

III.

I know! the world proscribes not love;
Allows my finger to caress
Your lip's contour and downiness,
Provided it supply a glove.
The world's good word!—the Institute!
Guizot receives Montalembert!
Eh? down the court three lampions flare—
Put forward your best foot!

A LIGHT WOMAN

I.

So far as our story approaches the end,
Which do you pity the most of us three?—

A LIGHT WOMAN

My friend, or the mistress of my friend
With her wanton eyes, or me?

II.

My friend was already too good to lose,
And seemed in the way of improvement yet,
When she crossed his path with her hunting-noose
And over him drew her net.

III.

When I saw him tangled in her toils,
A shame, said I, if she adds just him
To her nine-and-ninety other spoils,
The hundredth, for a whim!

IV.

And before my friend be wholly hers,
How easy to prove to him, I said,
An eagle's the game her pride prefers,
Though she snaps at the wren instead!

V.

So I gave her eyes my own eyes to take,
My hand sought her as in earnest need,
And round she turned for my noble sake,
And gave me herself indeed.

VI.

The eagle am I, with my fame in the world,
The wren is he, with his maiden face.
—You look away and your lip is curled?
Patience, a moment's space!

VII.

For see—my friend goes shaking and white;
He eyes me as the basilisk:
I have turned, it appears, his day to night,
Eclipsing his sun's disc.

VIII.

And I did it, he thinks, as a very thief:
“Though I love her—that he comprehends—

MEN AND WOMEN

One should master one's passions, (love, in chief)
And be loyal to one's friends !”

IX.

And she,—she lies in my hand as tame
As a pear hung basking over a wall ;
Just a touch to try and off it came ;
’Tis mine,—can I let it fall ?

X.

With no mind to eat it, that’s the worst !
Were it thrown in the road, would the case assist ?
’Twas quenching a dozen blue-flies’ thirst
When I gave its stalk a twist.

XI.

And I,—what I seem to my friend, you see—
What I soon shall seem to his love, you guess.
What I seem to myself, do you ask of me ?
No hero, I confess.

XII.

’Tis an awkward thing to play with souls,
And matter enough to save one’s own.
Yet think of my friend, and the burning coals
He played with for bits of stone !

XIII.

One likes to show the truth for the truth ;
That the woman was light is very true :
But suppose she says,—never mind that youth—
What wrong have I done to you ?

XIV.

Well, any how, here the story stays,
So far at least as I understand ;
And, Robert Browning, you writer of plays,
Here’s a subject made to your hand !

THE STATUE AND THE BUST

THE STATUE AND THE BUST

THERE'S a palace in Florence, the world knows well,
And a statue watches it from the square,
And this story of both do the townsmen tell.

Ages ago, a lady there,
At the farthest window facing the east
Asked, "Who rides by with the royal air?"

The brides-maids' prattle around her ceased;
She leaned forth, one on either hand;
They saw how the blush of the bride increased—

They felt by its beats her heart expand—
As one at each ear and both in a breath
Whispered, "The Great-Duke Ferdinand."

That selfsame instant, underneath,
The Duke rode past in his idle way,
Empty and fine like a swordless sheath.

Gay he rode, with a friend as gay,
Till he threw his head back—"Who is she?"
—"A Bride the Riccardi brings home to-day."

Hair in heaps laid heavily
Over a pale brow spirit-pure—
Carved like the heart of the coal-black tree,

Crisped like a war-steed's encolure—
Which vainly sought to dissemble her eyes
Of the blackest black our eyes endure.

And lo, a blade for a knight's emprise
Filled the fine empty sheath of a man,—
The Duke grew straightway brave and wise,

MEN AND WOMEN

He looked at her, as a lover can;
She looked at him, as one who awakes,—
The past was a sleep, and her life began

As love so ordered for both their sakes,
A feast was held that selfsame night
In the pile which the mighty shadow makes.

(For Via Larga is three-parts light,
But the Palace overshadows one,
Because of a crime which may God requite !

To Florence and God the wrong was done,
Through the first republic's murder there
By Cosimo and his cursed son.)

The Duke (with the statue's face in the square)
Turned in the midst of his multitude
At the bright approach of the bridal pair.

Face to face the lovers stood
A single minute and no more,
While the bridegroom bent as a man subdued—

Bowed till his bonnet brushed the floor—
For the Duke on the lady a kiss conferred,
As the courtly custom was of yore.

In a minute can lovers exchange a word ?
If a word did pass, which I do not think,
Only one out of the thousand heard.

That was the bridegroom. At day's brink
He and his bride were alone at last
In a bed-chamber by a taper's blink.

Calmly he said that her lot was cast,
That the door she had passed was shut on her
Till the final catafalk repassed.

THE STATUE AND THE BUST

The world meanwhile, its noise and stir,
Through a certain window facing the east
She might watch like a convent's chronicler.

Since passing the door might lead to a feast,
And a feast might lead to so much beside,
He, of many evils, chose the least.

"Freely I choose too," said the bride—
"Your window and its world suffice."
So replied the tongue, while the heart replied—

"If I spend the night with that devil twice,
May his window serve as my loop of hell
Whence a damned soul looks on Paradise!

"I fly to the Duke who loves me well,
Sit by his side and laugh at sorrow
Ere I count another ave-bell.

"'Tis only the coat of a page to borrow,
And tie my hair in a horse-boy's trim,
And I save my soul—but not to-morrow"—

(She checked herself and her eye grew dim)—
"My father tarries to bless my state:
I must keep it one day more for him.

"Is one day more so long to wait?
Moreover the Duke rides past, I know—
We shall see each other, sure as fate."

She turned on her side and slept. Just so!
So we resolve on a thing and sleep.
So did the lady, ages ago.

That night the Duke said, "Dear or cheap
As the cost of this cup of bliss may prove
To body or soul, I will drain it deep."

MEN AND WOMEN

And on the morrow, bold with love,
He beckoned the bridegroom (close on call,
As his duty bade, by the Duke's alcove)

And smiled " 'Twas a very funeral
Your lady will think, this feast of ours,—
A shame to efface, whate'er befall!

"What if we break from the Arno bowers,
And let Petraja, cool and green,
Cure last night's fault with this morning's flowers?"

The bridegroom, not a thought to be seen
On his steady brow and quiet mouth,
Said, "Too much favour for me so mean!

"Alas! my lady leaves the south.
Each wind that comes from the Apennine
Is a menace to her tender youth.

"No way exists, the wise opine,
If she quits her palace twice this year,
To avert the flower of life's decline."

Quoth the Duke, "A sage and a kindly fear.
Moreover Petraja is cold this spring—
Be our feast to-night as usual here!"

And then to himself—"Which night shall bring
Thy bride to her lover's embraces, fool—
Or I am the fool, and thou art his king!

"Yet my passion must wait a night, nor cool—
For to-night the Envoy arrives from France,
Whose heart I unlock with thyself, my tool.

"I need thee still and might miss perchance.
To-day is not wholly lost, beside,
With its hope of my lady's countenance—

THE STATUE AND THE BUST

"For I ride—what should I do but ride?
And passing her palace, if I list,
May glance at its window—well betide!"

So said, so done : nor the lady missed
One ray that broke from the ardent brow,
Nor a curl of the lips where the spirit kissed.

Be sure that each renewed the vow,
No morrow's sun should arise and set
And leave them then as it left them now.

But next day passed, and next day yet,
With still fresh cause to wait one more
Ere each leaped over the parapet.

And still, as love's brief morning wore,
With a gentle start, half smile, half sigh,
They found love not as it seemed before.

They thought it would work infallibly,
But not in despite of heaven and earth—
The rose would blow when the storm passed by.

Meantime they could profit in winter's dearth
By winter's fruits that supplant the rose :
The world and its ways have a certain worth !

And to press a point while these oppose
Were a simple policy—best wait,
And lose no friends and gain no foes.

Meanwhile, worse fates than a lover's fate,
Who daily may ride and lean and look
Where his lady watches behind the grate !

And she—she watched the square like a book
Holding one picture and only one,
Which daily to find she undertook.

MEN AND WOMEN

When the picture was reached the book was done,
And she turned from it all night to scheme
Of tearing it out for herself next sun.

Weeks grew months, years—gleam by gleam
The glory dropped from youth and love,
And both perceived they had dreamed a dream,

Which hovered as dreams do, still above,—
But who can take a dream for truth?
Oh, hide our eyes from the next remove!

One day as the lady saw her youth
Depart, and the silver thread that streaked
Her hair, and, worn by the serpent's tooth,

The brow so puckered, the chin so peaked,—
And wondered who the woman was,
So hollow-eyed and haggard-cheeked,

Fronting her silent in the glass—
“Summon here,” she suddenly said,
“Before the rest of my old self pass,

“Him, the Carver, a hand to aid,
Who moulds the clay no love will change,
And fixes a beauty never to fade.

“Let Robbia's craft so apt and strange
Arrest the remains of young and fair,
And rivet them while the seasons range.

“Make me a face on the window there
Waiting as ever, mute the while,
My love to pass below in the square!

“And let me think that it may beguile
Dreary days which the dead must spend
Down in their darkness under the aisle—

THE STATUE AND THE BUST

"To say,—'What matters at the end?
I did no more while my heart was warm,
Than does that image, my pale-faced friend.'

"Where is the use of the lip's red charm,
The heaven of hair, the pride of the brow,
And the blood that blues the inside arm—

"Unless we turn, as the soul knows how,
The earthly gift to an end divine?
A lady of clay is as good, I trow."

But long ere Robbia's cornice, fine
With flowers and fruits which leaves enlace,
Was set where now is the empty shrine—

(With, leaning out of a bright blue space,
As a ghost might from a chink of sky,
The passionate pale lady's face—

Eyeing ever with earnest eye
And quick-turned neck at its breathless stretch,
Some one who ever passes by—)

The Duke sighed like the simplest wretch
In Florence, "So, my dream escapes!
Will its record stay?" And he bade them fetch

Some subtle fashioner of shapes—
"Can the soul, the will, die out of a man
Ere his body find the grave that gapes?

"John of Douay shall work my plan,
Mould me on horseback here aloft,
Alive—(the subtle artisan!)

"In the very square I cross so oft!
That men may admire, when future suns
Shall touch the eyes to a purpose soft,

MEN AND WOMEN

“While the mouth and the brow are brave in bronze--
Admire and say, ‘When he was alive,
How he would take his pleasure once!’

“And it shall go hard but I contrive
To listen meanwhile and laugh in my tomb
At indolence which aspires to strive.”

So! while these wait the trump of doom,
How do their spirits pass, I wonder,
Nights and days in the narrow room?

Still, I suppose, they sit and ponder
What a gift life was, ages ago,
Six steps out of the chapel yonder.

Surely they see not God, I know,
Nor all that chivalry of His,
The soldier-saints who, row on row,

Burn upward each to his point of bliss--
Since, the end of life being manifest,
He had cut his way thro’ the world to this.

I hear your reproach--“But delay was best,
For their end was a crime!”—Oh, a crime will do
As well, I reply, to serve for a test,

As a virtue golden through and through,
Sufficient to vindicate itself
And prove its worth at a moment’s view.

Must a game be played for the sake of pelf?
Where a button goes, ’twere an epigram
To offer the stamp of the very Guelph.

The true has no value beyond the sham.
As well the counter as coin, I submit,
When your table’s a hat, and your prize, a dram.

LOVE IN A LIFE

Stake your counter as boldly every whit,
Venture as truly, use the same skill,
Do your best, whether winning or losing it,

If you choose to play—is my principle!
Let a man contend to the uttermost
For his life's set prize, be what it will!

The counter our lovers staked was lost
As surely as if it were lawful coin:
And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost

Was, the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,
Though the end in sight was a crime, I say.
You of the virtue, (we issue join)
How strive you? *De te, fabula!*

LOVE IN A LIFE

I.

Room after room,
I hunt the house through
We inhabit together.
Heart, fear nothing, for, heart, thou shalt find her,
Next time, herself!—not the trouble behind her
Left in the curtain, the couch's perfume!
As she brushed it, the cornice-wreath blossomed anew,—
Yon looking-glass gleamed at the wave of her feather.

II.

Yet the day wears,
And door succeeds door;
I try the fresh fortune—
Range the wide house from the wing to the centre.
Still the same chance! she goes out as I enter.
Spend my whole day in the quest,—who cares?
But 'tis twilight, you see, —with such suites to explore,
Such closets to search, such alcoves to importune!

MEN AND WOMEN

LIFE IN A LOVE

ESCAPE me?

Never—

Beloved!

While I am I, and you are you,
So long as the world contains us both,
Me the loving and you the loth,
While the one eludes, must the other pursue.
My life is a fault at last, I fear—
It seems too much like a fate, indeed!
Though I do my best I shall scarce succeed—
But what if I fail of my purpose here?
It is but to keep the nerves at strain,
To dry one's eyes and laugh at a fall,
And baffled, get up to begin again,—
So the chace takes up one's life, that's all.
While, look but once from your farthest bound,
At me so deep in the dust and dark,
No sooner the old hope drops to ground
Than a new one, straight to the self-same mark,
I shape me—
Ever
Removed!

HOW IT STRIKES A CONTEMPORARY

I ONLY knew one poet in my life:
And this, or something like it, was his way.

You saw go up and down Valladolid,
A man of mark, to know next time you saw.
His very serviceable suit of black
Was courtly once and conscientious still,
And many might have worn it, though none did:
The cloak that somewhat shone and shewed the
threads

A CONTEMPORARY

Had purpose, and the ruff, significance.
He walked and tapped the pavement with his cane,
Scenting the world, looking it full in face,
An old dog, bald and blindish, at his heels.
They turned up, now, the alley by the church,
That leads no whither; now, they breathed themselves
On the main promenade just at the wrong time.
You'd come upon his scrutinising hat,
Making a peaked shade blacker than itself
Against the single window spared some house
Intact yet with its mouldered Moorish work,—
Or else surprise the ferrel of his stick
Trying the mortar's temper 'tween the chinks
Of some new shop a-building, French and fine.
He stood and watched the cobbler at his trade,
The man who slices lemons into drink,
The coffee-roaster's brazier, and the boys
That volunteer to help him turn its winch.
He glanced o'er books on stalls with half an eye,
And fly-leaf ballads on the vendor's string,
And broad-edge bold-print posters by the wall.
He took such cognisance of men and things,
If any beat a horse, you felt he saw;
If any cursed a woman, he took note;
Yet stared at nobody,—they stared at him,
And found, less to their pleasure than surprise,
He seemed to know them and expect as much.
So, next time that a neighbour's tongue was loosed,
It marked the shameful and notorious fact,
We had among us, not so much a spy,
As a recording chief-inquisitor,
The town's true master if the town but knew!
We merely kept a Governor for form,
While this man walked about and took account
Of all thought, said, and acted, then went home,
And wrote it fully to our Lord the King
Who has an itch to know things, He knows why,
And reads them in His bed-room of a night.
Oh, you might smile! there wanted not a touch,
A tang of . . . well, it was not wholly ease

MEN AND WOMEN

As back into your mind the man's look came—
Stricken in years a little,—such a brow
His eyes had to live under!—clear as flint
On either side the formidable nose
Curved, cut, and coloured, like an eagle's claw.
Had he to do with A.'s surprising fate?
When altogether old B. disappeared
And young C. got his mistress,—was't our friend,
His letter to the King, that did it all?
What paid the bloodless man for so much pains?
Our Lord the King has favourites manifold,
And shifts his ministry some once a month:
Our city gets new Governors at whiles,—
But never word or sign, that I could hear,
Notified to this man about the streets
The King's approval of those letters conned
The last thing duly at the dead of night.
Did the man love his office? frowned our Lord,
Exhorting when none heard—"Beseech me not!
Too far above my people,—beneath Me!
I set the watch,—how should the people know?
Forget them, keep Me all the more in mind!"
Was some such understanding 'twixt the Two?

I found no truth in one report at least—
That if you tracked him to his home, down lanes
Beyond the Jewry, and as clean to pace,
You found he ate his supper in a room
Blazing with lights, four Titians on the wall,
And twenty naked girls to change his plate!
Poor man, he lived another kind of life
In that new, stuccoed, third house by the bridge,
Fresh-painted, rather smart than otherwise!
The whole street might o'erlook him as he sat,
Leg crossing leg, one foot on the dog's back,
Playing a decent cribbage with his maid
(Jacynth, you're sure her name was) o'er the cheese
And fruit, three red halves of starved winter-pears,
Or treat of radishes in April! nine—
Ten, struck the church clock, straight to bed went he.

THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER

My father, like the man of sense he was,
Would point him out to me a dozen times;
"St—St," he'd whisper, "the Corregidor!"
I had been used to think that personage
Was one with lacquered breeches, lustrous belt,
And feathers like a forest in his hat,
Who blew a trumpet and proclaimed the news,
Announced the bull-fights, gave each church its turn,
And memorized the miracle in vogue!
He had a great observance from us boys—
I was in error; that was not the man.

I'd like now, yet had haply been afraid,
To have just looked, when this man came to die,
And seen who lined the clean gay garret's sides
And stood about the neat low truckle-bed,
With the heavenly manner of relieving guard.
Here had been, mark, the general-in-chief,
Thro' a whole campaign of the world's life and death,
Doing the King's work all the dim day long,
In his old coat, and up to his knees in mud,
Smoked like a herring, dining on a crust,—
And now the day was won, relieved at once!
No further show or need for that old coat,
You are sure, for one thing! Bless us, all the while
How sprucely we are dressed out, you and I!
A second, and the angels alter that.
Well, I could never write a verse,—could you?
Let's to the Prado and make the most of time.

THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER

I.

I SAID—Then, dearest, since 'tis so,
Since now at length my fate I know,
Since nothing all my love avails,
Since all my life seemed meant for, fails,
Since this was written and needs must be—

MEN AND WOMEN

My whole heart rises up to bless
Your name in pride and thankfulness!
Take back the hope you gave,—I claim
Only a memory of the same,
—And this beside, if you will not blame,
Your leave for one more last ride with me.

II.

My mistress bent that brow of hers,
Those deep dark eyes where pride demurs
When pity would be softening through,
Fixed me a breathing-while or two
With life or death in the balance—Right!
The blood replenished me again:
My last thought was at least not vain.
I and my mistress, side by side
Shall be together, breathe and ride,
So one day more am I defied.

Who knows but the world may end to-night?

III.

Hush! if you saw some western cloud
All billowy-bosomed, over-bowed
By many benedictions—sun's
And moon's and evening star's at once—
And so, you, looking and loving best,
Conscious grew, your passion drew
Cloud, sunset, moonrise, star-shine too
Down on you, near and yet more near,
Till flesh must fade for heaven was here!—
Thus leant she and lingered—joy and fear!
Thus lay she a moment on my breast.

IV.

Then we began to ride. My soul
Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll
Freshening and fluttering in the wind.
Past hopes already lay behind.

What need to strive with a life awry?
Had I said that, had I done this,

THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER

So might I gain, so might I miss.
Might she have loved me? just as well
She might have hated,—who can tell?
Where had I been now if the worst befell?
And here we are riding, she and I.

V.

Fail I alone, in words and deeds?
Why, all men strive and who succeeds?
We rode; it seemed my spirit flew,
Saw other regions, cities new,
As the world rushed by on either side.
I thought, All labour, yet no less
Bear up beneath their unsuccess.
Look at the end of work, contrast
The petty Done the Undone vast,
This present of theirs with the hopeful past!
I hoped she would love me. Here we ride.

VI.

What hand and brain went ever paired?
What heart alike conceived and dared?
What act proved all its thought had been?
What will but felt the fleshly screen?
We ride and I see her bosom heave.
There's many a crown for who can reach.
Ten lines, a statesman's life in each!
The flag stuck on a heap of bones,
A soldier's doing! what atones?
They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones.
My riding is better, by their leave.

VII.

What does it all mean, poet? well,
Your brain's beat into rhythm—you tell
What we felt only; you expressed
You hold things beautiful the best,
And pace them in rhyme so, side by side.
'Tis something, nay 'tis much—but then,
Have you yourself what's best for men?

MEN AND WOMEN

Are you—poor, sick, old ere your time—
Nearer one whit your own sublime
Than we who never have turned a rhyme?
Sing, riding's a joy! For me, I ride.

VIII.

And you, great sculptor—so you gave
A score of years to art, her slave,
And that's your Venus—whence we turn
To yonder girl that fords the burn!
You acquiesce and shall I repine?
What, man of music, you, grown grey
With notes and nothing else to say,
Is this your sole praise from a friend,
“Greatly his opera's strains intend,
But in music we know how fashions end!”
I gave my youth—but we ride, in fine.

IX.

Who knows what's fit for us? Had fate
Proposed bliss here should sublimate
My being; had I signed the bond—
Still one must lead some life beyond,
—Have a bliss to die with, dim-described.
This foot once planted on the goal,
This glory-garland round my soul,
Could I descry such? Try and test!
I sink back shuddering from the quest—
Earth being so good, would Heaven seem best?
Now, Heaven and she are beyond this ride.

X.

And yet—she has not spoke so long!
What if Heaven be, that, fair and strong
At life's best, with our eyes upturned
Whither life's flower is first discerned,
We, fixed so, ever should so abide?
What if we still ride on, we two,
With life for ever old yet new,
Changed not in kind but in degree,

THE PATRIOT

The instant made eternity,—
And Heaven just prove that I and she
Ride, ride together, for ever ride?

THE PATRIOT

AN OLD STORY.

I.

It was roses, roses, all the way,
With myrtle mixed in my path like mad.
The house-roofs seemed to heave and sway,
The church-spires flamed, such flags they had,
A year ago on this very day!

II.

The air broke into a mist with bells,
The old walls rocked with the crowds and cries.
Had I said, "Good folks, mere noise repels—
But give me your sun from yonder skies!"
They had answered, "And afterward, what else?"

III.

Alack, it was I who leaped at the sun,
To give it my loving friends to keep.
Nought man could do, have I left undone
And you see my harvest, what I reap
This very day, now a year is run.

IV.

There's nobody on the house-tops now—
Just a palsied few at the windows set—
For the best of the sight is, all allow,
At the Shambles' Gate—or, better yet,
By the very scaffold's foot, I trow,

MEN AND WOMEN

V.

I go in the rain, and, more than needs,
A rope cuts both my wrists behind,
And I think, by the feel, my forehead bleeds,
For they fling, whoever has a mind,
Stones at me for my year's misdeeds.

VI.

Thus I entered Brescia, and thus I go !
In such triumphs, people have dropped down
dead.
"Thou, paid by the World,—what dost thou owe
Me?" God might have questioned: but now
instead
'Tis God shall requite! I am safer so.

MASTER HUGUES OF SAXE-GOTHA

I.

HIST, but a word, fair and soft !
Forth and be judged, Master Hugues!
Answer the question I've put you so oft—
What do you mean by your mountainous fugues ?
See, we're alone in the loft,

II.

I, the poor organist here,
Hugues, the composer of note—
Dead, though, and done with, this many a year—
Let's have a colloquy, something to quote,
Make the world prick up its ear!

III.

See, the church empties a-pace.
Fast they extinguish the lights—
Hallo, there, sacristan! five minutes' grace!
Here's a crank pedal wants setting to rights,
Baulks one of holding the base.

MASTER HUGUES

IV.

See, our huge house of the sounds
Hushing its hundreds at once,
Bids the last loiterer back to his bounds
—Oh, you may challenge them, not a response
Get the church saints on their rounds !

V.

(Saints go their rounds, who shall doubt ?
—March, with the moon to admire,
Up nave, down chancel, turn transept about,
Supervise all betwixt pavement and spire,
Put rats and mice to the rout—

VI.

Aloys and Jurien and Just—
Order things back to their place,
Have a sharp eye lest the candlesticks rust,
Rub the church plate, darn the sacrament lace,
Clear the desk velvet of dust.)

VII.

Here's your book, younger folks shelve !
Played I not off-hand and runningly,
Just now, your masterpiece, hard number twelve?
Here's what should strike,—could one handle it
cunningly.
Help the axe, give it a helve !

VIII.

Page after page as I played,
Every bar's rest where one wipes
Sweat from one's brow, I looked up and surveyed
O'er my three claviers, yon forest of pipes
Whence you still peeped in the shade.

IX.

Sure you were wishful to speak,
You, with brow ruled like a score,
Yes, and eyes buried in pits on each cheek,

MEN AND WOMEN

Like two great breves as they wrote them of
yore
Each side that bar, your straight beak!

X.

Sure you said—"Good, the mere notes!
Still, couldst thou take my intent,
Know what procured me our Company's votes—
Masters being lauded and sciolists shent,
Parted the sheep from the goats!"

XI.

Well then, speak up, never flinch!
Quick, ere my candle's a snuff
—Burnt, do you see? to its uttermost inch—
I believe in you, but that's not enough.
Give my conviction a clinch!

XII.

First you deliver your phrase
—Nothing propound, that I see,
Fit in itself for much blame or much praise—
Answered no less, where no answer needs be:
Off start the Two on their ways!

XIII.

Straight must a Third interpose,
Volunteer needlessly help—
In strikes a Fourth, a Fifth thrusts in his nose,
So the cry's open, the kennel's a-yelp,
Argument's hot to the close!

XIV.

One dissertates, he is candid—
Two must discept,—has distinguished!
Three helps the couple, if ever yet man did:
Four protests, Five makes a dart at the thing
wished—
Back to One, goes the case bandied!

MASTER HUGUES

XV.

One says his say with a difference—
More of expounding, explaining!
All now is wrangle, abuse, and vociferance—
Now there's a truce, all's subdued, self-
restraining—
Five, though, stands out all the stiffer hence.

XVI.

One is incisive, corrosive—
Two retorts, nettled, curt, crepitant—
Three makes rejoinder, expansive, explosive—
Four overbears them all, strident and strepitant—
Five . . . O Danaides, O Sieve!

XVII.

Now, they ply axes and crowbars—
Now, they prick pins at a tissue
Fine as a skein of the casuist Escobar's
Worked on the bone of a lie. To what issue?
Where is our gain at the Two-bars?

XVIII.

Est fuga, volvitur rota!
On we drift. Where looms the dim port?
One, Two, Three, Four, Five, contribute their
quota—
Something is gained, if one caught but the im-
port—
Show it us, Hugues of Saxe-Gotha!

XIX.

What with affirming, denying,
Holding, risposting, subjoining,
All's like . . . it's like . . . for an instance I'm
trying . . .
There! See our roof, its gilt moulding and
groining
Under those spider-webs lying!

MEN AND WOMEN

XX.

So your fugue broadens and thickens,
Greatens and deepens and lengthens,
Till one exclaims—"But where's music, the
dickens?
Blot ye the gold, while your spider-web
strengthens,
Blackened to the stoutest of tickens?"

XXI.

I for man's effort am zealous.
Prove me such censure's unfounded!
Seems it surprising a lover grows jealous—
Hopes 'twas for something his organ-pipes
sounded,
Tiring three boys at the bellows?

XXII.

Is it your moral of Life?
Such a web, simple and subtle,
Weave we on earth herein impotent strife,
Backward and forward each throwing his shuttle,
Death ending all with a knife?

XXIII.

Over our heads Truth and Nature—
Still our life's zigzags and dodges,
Ins and outs weaving a new legislature—
God's gold just shining its last where that lodges,
Palled beneath Man's usurpature!

XXIV.

So we o'ershroud stars and roses,
Cherub and trophy and garland.
Nothings grow something which quietly closes
Heaven's earnest eye,—not a glimpse of the far
land
Gets through our comments and glozes.

MASTER HUGUES

XXV.

Ah, but traditions, inventions,
(Say we and make up a visage)
So many men with such various intentions
Down the past ages must know more than this
age!
Leave the web all its dimensions!

XXVI.

Who thinks Hugues wrote for the deaf?
Proved a mere mountain in labour?
Better submit—try again—what's the clef?
'Faith, it's no trifle for pipe and for tabor—
Four flats—the minor in F.

XXVII.

Friend, your fugue taxes the finger.
Learning it once, who would lose it?
Yet all the while a misgiving will linger—
Truth's golden o'er us although we refuse it—
Nature, thro' dust-clouds we fling her!

XXVIII.

Hugues! I advise *meâ pœnâ*
(Counterpoint glares like a Gorgon)
Bid One, Two, Three, Four, Five, clear the arena!
Say the word, straight I unstop the Full-Organ,
Blare out the *mode Palestrina*.

XXIX.

While in the roof, if I'm right there—
. . . Lo, you, the wick in the socket!
Hallo, you sacristan, show us a light there!
Down it dips, gone like a rocket!
What, you want, do you, to come unawares,
Sweeping the church up for first morning-prayers,
And find a poor devil at end of his cares
At the foot of your rotten-planked rat-riddled
stairs?
Do I carry the moon in my pocket?

MEN AND WOMEN

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

No more wine? Then we'll push back chairs and talk.

A final glass for me, tho'; cool, i'faith!
We ought to have our Abbey back, you see.
It's different, preaching in basilicas,
And doing duty in some masterpiece
Like this of brother Pugin's, bless his heart!
I doubt if they're half baked, those chalk rosettes,
Ciphers and stucco-twiddlings everywhere;
It's just like breathing in a lime-kiln: eh?
These hot long ceremonies of our church
Cost us a little—oh, they pay the price,
You take me—amply pay it! Now, we'll talk.

So, you despise me, Mr. Gigadibs.
No deprecation,—nay, I beg you, sir!
Beside 'tis our engagement: don't you know,
I promised, if you'd watch a dinner out,
We'd see truth dawn together?—truth that peeps
Over the glass's edge when dinner's done,
And body gets its sop and holds its noise
And leaves soul free a little. Now's the time—
'Tis break of day! You do despise me then.
And if I say, "despise me,"—never fear—
I know you do not in a certain sense—
Not in my arm-chair for example: here,
I well imagine you respect my place
(Status, *entourage*, worldly circumstance)
Quite to its value—very much indeed
—Are up to the protesting eyes of you
In pride at being seated here for once—
You'll turn it to such capital account!
When somebody, through years and years to come,
Hints of the bishop,—names me—that's enough—
"Blougram? I knew him"—(into it you slide)

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

"Dined with him once, a Corpus Christi Day,
All alone, we two—he's a clever man—
And after dinner,—why, the wine you know,—
Oh, there was wine, and good!—what with the
wine . . .

'Faith, we began upon all sorts of talk!
He's no bad fellow, Blougram—he had seen
Something of mine he relished—some review—
He's quite above their humbug in his heart,
Half-said as much, indeed—the thing's his trade—
I warrant, Blougram's sceptical at times—
How otherwise? I liked him, I confess!"

Che ch'è, my dear sir, as we say at Rome,
Don't you protest now! It's fair give and take;
You have had your turn and spoken your home-
truths—

The hand's mine now, and here you follow suit.

Thus much conceded, still the first fact stays—
You do despise me; your ideal of life
Is not the bishop's—you would not be I—
You would like better to be Goethe, now,
Or Buonaparte—or, bless me, lower still,
Count D'Orsay,—so you did what you preferred,
Spoke as you thought, and, as you cannot help,
Believed or disbelieved, no matter what,
So long as on that point, whate'er it was,
You loosed your mind, were whole and sole your-
self.

—That, my ideal never can include,
Upon that element of truth and worth
Never be based! for say they make me Pope
(They can't—suppose it for our argument)
Why, there I'm at my tether's end—I've reached
My height, and not a height which pleases you.
An unbelieving Pope won't do, you say.
It's like those eerie stories nurses tell,
Of how some actor played Death on a stage
With pasteboard crown, sham orb, and tinselled
dart,

MEN AND WOMEN

And called himself the monarch of the world,
Then going in the tire-room afterward
Because the play was done, to shift himself,
Got touched upon the sleeve familiarly
The moment he had shut the closet door
By Death himself. Thus God might touch a Pope
At unawares, ask what his baubles mean,
And whose part he presumed to play just now?
Best be yourself, imperial, plain and true!

So, drawing comfortable breath again,
You weigh and find whatever more or less
I boast of my ideal realised
Is nothing in the balance when opposed
To your ideal, your grand simple life,
Of which you will not realise one jot.
I am much, you are nothing; you would be all,
I would be merely much—you beat me there.

No, friend, you do not beat me,—hearken why.
The common problem, yours, mine, every one's,
Is not to fancy what were fair in life
Provided it could be,—but, finding first
What may be, then find how to make it fair
Up to our means—a very different thing!
No abstract intellectual plan of life
Quite irrespective of life's plainest laws,
But one, a man, who is man and nothing more,
May lead within a world which (by your leave)
Is Rome or London—not Fool's-paradise.
Embellish Rome, idealise away,
Make Paradise of London if you can,
You're welcome, nay, you're wise.

A simile!

We mortals cross the ocean of this world
Each in his average cabin of a life—
The best's not big, the worst yields elbow-room.
Now for our six months' voyage—how prepare?

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

You come on shipboard with a landsman's list
Of things he calls convenient—so they are!
An India screen is pretty furniture,
A piano-forte is a fine resource,
All Balzac's novels occupy one shelf,
The new edition fifty volumes long;
And little Greek books with the funny type
They get up well at Leipsic fill the next—
Go on! slabbed marble, what a bath it makes!
And Parma's pride, the Jerome, let us add!
'Twere pleasant could Correggio's fleeting glow
Hang full in face of one where'er one roams,
Since he more than the others brings with him
Italy's self,—the marvellous Modenese!
Yet 'twas not on your list before, perhaps.
—Alas! friend, here's the agent . . . is't the name?
The captain, or whoever's master here—
You see him screw his face up; what's his cry
Ere you set foot on shipboard? "Six feet square!"
If you won't understand what six feet mean,
Compute and purchase stores accordingly—
And if in pique because he overhauls
Your Jerome, piano and bath, you come on board
Bare—why you cut a figure at the first
While sympathetic landsmen see you off;
Not afterwards, when, long ere half seas o'er,
You peep up from your utterly naked boards
Into some snug and well-appointed berth
Like mine, for instance (try the cooler jug—
Put back the other, but don't jog the ice)
And mortified you mutter "Well and good—
He sits enjoying his sea-furniture—
'Tis stout and proper, and there's store of it,
Though I've the better notion, all agree,
Of fitting rooms up! hang the carpenter,
Neat ship-shape fixings and contrivances—
I would have brought my Jerome, frame and all!"
And meantime you bring nothing: never mind—
You've proved your artist-nature: what you don't,
You might bring, so despise me, as I say.

MEN AND WOMEN

Now come, let's backward to the starting place.
See my way: we're two college friends, suppose—
Prepare together for our voyage, then,
Each note and check the other in his work,—
Here's mine, a bishop's outfit; criticise!
What's wrong? why won't you be a bishop too?

Why, first, you don't believe, you don't and can't,
(Not statedly, that is, and fixedly
And absolutely and exclusively)
In any revelation called divine.
No dogmas nail your faith—and what remains
But say so, like the honest man you are?
First, therefore, overhaul theology!
Nay, I too, not a fool, you please to think,
Must find believing every whit as hard,
And if I do not frankly say as much,
The ugly consequence is clear enough.

Now, wait, my friend: well, I do not believe—
If you'll accept no faith that is not fixed,
Absolute and exclusive, as you say.
(You're wrong—I mean to prove it in due time)
Meanwhile, I know where difficulties lie
I could not, cannot solve, nor ever shall,
So give up hope accordingly to solve—
(To you, and over the wine). Our dogmas then
With both of us, tho' in unlike degree,
Missing full credence—overboard with them!
I mean to meet you on your own premise—
Good, there go mine in company with yours!

And now what are we? unbelievers both,
Calm and complete, determinately fixed
To-day, to-morrow, and for ever, pray?
You'll guarantee me that? Not so, I think.
In no-wise! all we've gained is, that belief,
As unbelief before, shakes us by fits,
Confounds us like its predecessor. Where's

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

The gain? how can we guard our unbelief,
Make it bear fruit to us?—the problem here.
Just when we are safest, there's a sunset-touch,
A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,
A chorus-ending from Euripides,—
And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears
As old and new at once as Nature's self,
To rap and knock and enter in our soul,
Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring,
Round the ancient idol, on his base again,—
The grand Perhaps! we look on helplessly,—
There the old misgivings, crooked questions are—
This good God,—what he could do, if he would,
Would, if he could—then must have done long since:
If so, when, where, and how? some way must be,—
Once feel about, and soon or late you hit
Some sense, in which it might be, after all.
Why not, "The Way, the Truth, the Life?"

—That way

Over the mountain, which who stands upon
Is apt to doubt if it's indeed a road;
While if he views it from the waste itself,
Up goes the line there, plain from base to brow,
Not vague, mistakeable! what's a break or two
Seen from the unbroken desert either side?
And then (to bring in fresh philosophy)
What if the breaks themselves should prove at last
The most consummate of contrivances
To train a man's eye, teach him what is faith,—
And so we stumble at truth's very test?
What have we gained then by our unbelief
But a life of doubt diversified by faith,
For one of faith diversified by doubt?
We called the chess-board white,—we call it black.

"Well," you rejoin, "the end's no worse, at least,
We've reason for both colours on the board.
Why not confess, then, where I drop the faith
And you the doubt, that I'm as right as you?"

MEN AND WOMEN

Because, friend, in the next place, this being so,
And both things even,—faith and unbelief
Left to a man's choice,—we'll proceed a step,
Returning to our image, which I like.

A man's choice, yes—but a cabin-passenger's—
The man made for the special life of the world—
Do you forget him? I remember though!
Consult our ship's conditions and you find
One and but one choice suitable to all,
The choice that you unluckily prefer
Turning things topsy-turvy—they or it
Going to the ground. Belief or unbelief
Bears upon life, determines its whole course,
Begins at its beginning. See the world
Such as it is,—you made it not, nor I;
I mean to take it as it is,—and you
Not so you'll take it,—though you get nought else.
I know the special kind of life I like,
What suits the most my idiosyncrasy,
Brings out the best of me and bears me fruit
In power, peace, pleasantness, and length of days.
I find that positive belief does this
For me, and unbelief, no whit of this.
—For you, it does, however—that we'll try!
'Tis clear, I cannot lead my life, at least
Induce the world to let me peaceably,
Without declaring at the outset, "Friends,
I absolutely and peremptorily
Believe!"—I say faith is my waking life.
One sleeps, indeed, and dreams at intervals,
We know, but waking's the main point with us,
And my provision's for life's waking part.
Accordingly, I use heart, head and hands
All day, I build, scheme, study and make friends;
And when night overtakes me, down I lie,
Sleep, dream a little, and get done with it,
The sooner the better, to begin afresh.
What's midnight's doubt before the dayspring's faith?
You, the philosopher, that disbelieve,

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

That recognise the night, give dreams their weight—
To be consistent you should keep your bed,
Abstain from healthy acts that prove you a man,
For fear you drowse perhaps at unawares!
And certainly at night you'll sleep and dream,
Live through the day and bustle as you please.
And so you live to sleep as I to wake,
To unbelieve as I to still believe?
Well, and the common sense of the world calls you
Bed-ridden,—and its good things come to me.
Its estimation, which is half the fight,
That's the first cabin-comfort I secure—
The next . . . but you perceive with half an eye!
Come, come, it's best believing, if we can—
You can't but own that.

Next, concede again—

If once we choose belief, on all accounts
We can't be too decisive in our faith,
Conclusive and exclusive in its terms,
To suit the world which gives us the good things.
In every man's career are certain points
Whereon he dares not be indifferent;
The world detects him clearly, if he is,
As baffled at the game, and losing life.
He may care little or he may care much
For riches, honour, pleasure, work, repose,
Since various theories of life and life's
Success are extant which might easily
Comport with either estimate of these,
And whoso chooses wealth or poverty,
Labour or quiet, is not judged a fool
Because his fellows would choose otherwise.
We let him choose upon his own account
So long as he's consistent with his choice.
But certain points, left wholly to himself,
When once a man has arbitrated on,
We say he must succeed there or go hang.
Thus, he should wed the woman he loves most
Or needs most, whatsoe'er the love or need—

MEN AND WOMEN

For he can't wed twice. Then, he must avouch
Or follow, at the least, sufficiently,
The form of faith his conscience holds the best,
Whate'er the process of conviction was.
For nothing can compensate his mistake
On such a point, the man himself being judge—
He cannot wed twice, nor twice lose his soul.

Well now—there's one great form of Christian faith
I happened to be born in—which to teach
Was given me as I grew up, on all hands,
As best and readiest means of living by;
The same on examination being proved
The most pronounced moreover, fixed, precise
And absolute form of faith in the whole world—
Accordingly, most potent of all forms
For working on the world. Observe, my friend,
Such as you know me, I am free to say,
In these hard latter days which hamper one,
Myself, by no immoderate exercise
Of intellect and learning, and the tact
To let external forces work for me,
Bid the street's stones be bread and they are bread,
Bid Peter's creed, or, rather, Hildebrand's,
Exalt me o'er my fellows in the world
And make my life an ease and joy and pride,
It does so,—which for me's a great point gained,
Who have a soul and body that exact
A comfortable care in many ways.
There's power in me and will to dominate
Which I must exercise, they hurt me else:
In many ways I need mankind's respect,
Obedience, and the love that's born of fear:
While at the same time, there's a taste I have,
A toy of soul, a titillating thing,
Refuses to digest these dainties crude.
The naked life is gross till clothed upon:
I must take what men offer, with a grace
As though I would not, could I help it, take!
A uniform to wear though over-rich—

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

Something imposed on me, no choice of mine;
No fancy-dress worn for pure fashion's sake
And despicable therefore! now men kneel
And kiss my hand—of course the Church's hand.
Thus I am made, thus life is best for me,
And thus that it should be I have procured;
And thus it could not be another way,
I venture to imagine.

You'll reply—

So far my choice, no doubt, is a success;
But were I made of better elements,
With nobler instincts, purer tastes, like you,
I hardly would account the thing success
Though it do all for me I say.

But, friend,

We speak of what is—not of what might be,
And how 'twere better if 'twere otherwise.
I am the man you see here plain enough—
Grant I'm a beast, why beasts must lead beasts' lives!
Suppose I own at once to tail and claws—
The tailless man exceeds me; but being tailed
I'll lash out lion-fashion, and leave apes
To dock their stump and dress their haunches up.
My business is not to remake myself,
But make the absolute best of what God made.
Or—our first simile—though you proved me doomed
To a viler berth still, to the steerage-hole,
The sheep-pen or the pig-stye, I should strive
To make what use of each were possible;
And as this cabin gets upholstery,
That hutch should rustle with sufficient straw.

But, friend, I don't acknowledge quite so fast
I fail of all your manhood's lofty tastes
Enumerated so complacently,
On the mere ground that you forsooth can find
In this particular life I choose to lead
No fit provision for them. Can you not?

MEN AND WOMEN

Say you, my fault is I address myself
To grosser estimators than I need,
And that's no way of holding up the soul—
Which, nobler, needs men's praise perhaps, yet knows
One wise man's verdict outweighs all the fools',—
Would like the two, but, forced to choose, takes
that?

I pine among my million imbeciles
(You think) aware some dozen men of sense
Eye me and know me, whether I believe
In the last winking Virgin, as I vow,
And am a fool, or disbelieve in her
And am a knave,—approve in neither case,
Withhold their voices though I look their way :
Like Verdi when, at his worst opera's end
(The thing they gave at Florence,—what's its name?)
While the mad houseful's plaudits near out-bang
His orchestra of salt-box, tongs and bones,
He looks through all the roaring and the wreaths
Where sits Rossini patient in his stall.

Nay, friend, I meet you with an answer here—
For even your prime men who appraise their kind
Are men still, catch a thing within a thing,
See more in a truth than the truth's simple self,
Confuse themselves. You see lads walk the street
Sixty the minute; what's to note in that?
You see one lad o'erstride a chimney-stack;
Him you must watch—he's sure to fall, yet stands!
Our interest's on the dangerous edge of things.
The honest thief, the tender murderer,
The superstitious atheist, demireps
That love and save their souls in new French books—
We watch while these in equilibrium keep
The giddy line midway : one step aside,
They're classed and done with. I, then, keep the line
Before your sages,—just the men to shrink
From the gross weights, coarse scales, and labels
broad

You offer their refinement. Fool or knave?

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

Why needs a bishop be a fool or knave
When there's a thousand diamond weights between?
So I enlist them. Your picked Twelve, you'll find,
Profess themselves indignant, scandalised
At thus being held unable to explain
How a superior man who disbelieves
May not believe as well: that's Schelling's way!
It's through my coming in the tail of time,
Nicking the minute with a happy tact.
Had I been born three hundred years ago
They'd say, "What's strange? Blougram of course
believes;"

And, seventy years since, "disbelieves of course."
But now, "He may believe; and yet, and yet
How can he?"—All eyes turn with interest.
Whereas, step off the line on either side—
You, for example, clever to a fault,
The rough and ready man that write apace,
Read somewhat seldomer, think perhaps even less—
You disbelieve! Who wonders and who cares?
Lord So-and-So—his coat bedropt with wax,
All Peter's chains about his waist, his back
Brave with the needlework of Noodledom,
Believes! Again, who wonders and who cares?
But I, the man of sense and learning too,
The able to think yet act, the this, the that,
I, to believe at this late time of day!
Enough; you see, I need not fear contempt.

—Except it's yours! admire me as these may,
You don't. But what at least do you admire?
Present your own perfections, your ideal,
Your pattern man for a minute—oh, make haste!
Is it Napoleon you would have us grow?
Concede the means; allow his head and hand,
(A large concession, clever as you are)
Good!—In our common primal element
Of unbelief (we can't believe, you know—
We're still at that admission, recollect)
Where do you find—apart from, towering-o'er

MEN AND WOMEN

The secondary temporary aims
Which satisfy the gross tastes you despise—
Where do you find his star?—his crazy trust
God knows through what or in what? it's alive
And shines and leads him and that's all we want.
Have we ought in our sober night shall point
Such ends as his were, and direct the means
Of working out our purpose straight as his,
Nor bring a moment's trouble on success
With after-care to justify the same?
—Be a Napoleon and yet disbelieve!
Why, the man's mad, friend, take his light away.
What's the vague good of the world for which you'd
dare
With comfort to yourself blow millions up?
We neither of us see it! we do see
The blown-up millions—spatter of their brains
And writhing of their bowels and so forth,
In that bewildering entanglement
Of horrible eventualities
Past calculation to the end of time!
Can I mistake for some clear word of God
(Which were my ample warrant for it all)
His puff of hazy instincts, idle talk,
“The state, that's I,” quack-nonsense about kings,
And (when one beats the man to his last hold)
The vague idea of setting things to rights,
Policing people efficaciously,
More to their profit, most of all to his own;
The whole to end that dismallest of ends
By an Austrian marriage, cant to us the church,
And resurrection of the old *regime*.
Would I, who hope to live a dozen years,
Fight Austerlitz for reasons such and such?
No: for, concede me but the merest chance
Doubt may be wrong—there's judgment, life to come!
With just that chance, I dare not. Doubt proves right?
This present life is all? you offer me
Its dozen noisy years with not a chance
That wedding an Arch-Duchess, wearing lace,

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

And getting called by divers new-coined names,
Will drive off ugly thoughts and let me dine,
Sleep, read and chat in quiet as I like!
Therefore, I will not.

Take another case;

Fit up the cabin yet another way.

What say you to the poet's? shall we write
Hamlets, Othellos—make the world our own,
Without a risk to run of either sort?

I can't!—to put the strongest reason first.

“But try,” you urge, “the trying shall suffice:

The aim, if reached or not, makes great the life.

Try to be Shakspeare, leave the rest to fate!”

Spare my self-knowledge—there's no fooling me!

If I prefer remaining my poor self,

I say so not in self-dispraise but praise.

If I'm a Shakspeare, let the well alone—

Why should I try to be what now I am?

If I'm no Shakspeare, as too probable,—

His power and consciousness and self-delight

And all we want in common, shall I find—

Trying for ever? while on points of taste

Wherewith, to speak it humbly, he and I

Are dowered alike—I'll ask you, I or he,

Which in our two lives realises most?

Much, he imagined—somewhat, I possess.

He had the imagination; stick to that!

Let him say “In the face of my soul's works

Your world is worthless and I touch it not

Lest I should wrong them”—I withdraw my plea.

But does he say so? look upon his life!

Himself, who only can, gives judgment there.

He leaves his towers and gorgeous palaces

To build the trimmest house in Stratford town;

Saves money, spends it, owns the worth of things,

Giulio Romano's pictures, Dowland's lute;

Enjoys a show, respects the puppets, too,

And none more, had he seen its entry once,

Than “Pandulph, of fair Milan cardinal.”

Why then should I who play that personage,

MEN AND WOMEN

The very Pandulph Shakspeare's fancy made,
Be told that had the poet chanced to start
From where I stand now (some degree like mine
Being just the goal he ran his race to reach)
He would have run the whole race back, forsooth,
And left being Pandulph, to begin write plays?
Ah, the earth's best can be but the earth's best!
Did Shakspeare live, he could but sit at home
And get himself in dreams the Vatican,
Greek busts, Venetian paintings, Roman walls,
And English books, none equal to his own,
Which I read, bound in gold, (he never did).
—'Terni and Naples' bay and Gothard's top—
Eh, friend? I could not fancy one of these—
But, as I pour this claret, there they are—
I've gained them—crossed St. Gothard last July
With ten mules to the carriage and a bed
Slung inside; is my hap the worse for that?
We want the same things, Shakspeare and myself,
And what I want, I have: he, gifted more,
Could fancy he too had it when he liked,
But not so thoroughly that if fate allowed
He would not have it also in my sense.
We play one game. I send the ball aloft
No less adroitly that of fifty strokes
Scarce five go o'er the wall so wide and high
Which sends them back to me: I wish and get.
He struck balls higher and with better skill,
But at a poor fence level with his head,
And hit—his Stratford house, a coat of arms,
Successful dealings in his grain and wool,—
While I receive heaven's incense in my nose
And style myself the cousin of Queen Bess.
Ask him, if this life's all, who wins the game?

Believe—and our whole argument breaks up.
Enthusiasm's the best thing, I repeat;
Only, we can't command it; fire and life
Are all, dead matter's nothing, we agree:
And be it a mad dream or God's very breath,

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

The fact's the same,—belief's fire once in us,
Makes of all else mere stuff to show itself.
We penetrate our life with such a glow
As fire lends wood and iron—this turns steel,
That burns to ash—all's one, fire proves its power
For good or ill, since men call flare success.
But paint a fire, it will not therefore burn.
Light one in me, I'll find it food enough!
Why, to be Luther—that's a life to lead,
Incomparably better than my own.
He comes, reclaims God's earth for God, he says,
Sets up God's rule again by simple means,
Re-opens a shut book, and all is done.
He flared out in the flaring of mankind;
Such Luther's luck was—how shall such be mine?
If he succeeded, nothing's left to do:
And if he did not altogether—well,
Strauss is the next advance. All Strauss should be
I might be also. But to what result?
He looks upon no future: Luther did.
What can I gain on the denying side?
Ice makes no conflagration. State the facts,
Read the text right, emancipate the world—
The emancipated world enjoys itself
With scarce a thank-you—Blougram told it first
It could not owe a farthing,—not to him
More than St. Paul! 'twould press its pay, you think?
Then add there's still that plaguey hundredth chance
Strauss may be wrong. And so a risk is run—
For what gain? not for Luther's, who secured
A real heaven in his heart throughout his life,
Supposing death a little altered things!

“Ay, but since really I lack faith,” you cry,
“I run the same risk really on all sides,
In cool indifference as bold unbelief.
As well be Strauss as swing 'twixt Paul and him.
It's not worth having, such imperfect faith,
Nor more available to do faith's work
Than unbelief like yours. Whole faith, or none!”

MEN AND WOMEN

Softly, my friend! I must dispute that point.
Once own the use of faith, I'll find you faith.
We're back on Christian ground. You call for faith;
I show you doubt, to prove that faith exists.
The more of doubt, the stronger faith, I say,
If faith o'ercomes doubt. How I know it does?
By life and man's free will, God gave for that!
To mould life as we choose it, shows our choice:
That's our one act, the previous work's His own.
You criticise the soil? it reared this tree—
This broad life and whatever fruit it bears!
What matter though I doubt at every pore,
Head-doubts, heart-doubts, doubts at my fingers' ends,
Doubts in the trivial work of every day,
Doubts at the very bases of my soul
In the grand moments when she probes herself—
If finally I have a life to show,
The thing I did, brought out in evidence
Against the thing done to me underground
By Hell and all its brood, for ought I know?
I say, whence sprang this? shows it faith or doubt?
All's doubt in me; where's break of faith in this?
It is the idea, the feeling and the love
God means mankind should strive for and show forth,
Whatever be the process to that end,—
And not historic knowledge, logic sound,
And metaphysical acumen, sure!
"What think ye of Christ," friend? when all's done
and said,
You like this Christianity or not?
It may be false, but will you wish it true?
Has it your vote to be so if it can?
Trust you an instinct silenced long ago
That will break silence and enjoin you love
What mortified philosophy is hoarse,
And all in vain, with bidding you despise?
If you desire faith—then you've faith enough.
What else seeks God—nay, what else seek ourselves?
You form a notion of me, we'll suppose,
On hearsay; it's a favourable one:

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

"But still" (you add), "there was no such good man,
Because of contradictions in the facts.

One proves, for instance, he was born in Rome,
This Blougram—yet throughout the tales of him
I see he figures as an Englishman."

Well, the two things are reconcilable.

But would I rather you discovered that.

Subjoining—"Still, what matter though they be?

Blougram—concerns me nought, born here or there."

Pure faith indeed—you know not what you ask!

Naked belief in God the Omnipotent,

Omniscient, Omnipresent, scars too much

The sense of conscious creatures to be borne.

It were the seeing him, no flesh shall dare.

Some think, Creation's meant to show him forth:

I say, it's meant to hide him all it can,

And that's what all the blessed Evil's for.

Its use in time is to environ us,

Our breath, our drop of dew, with shield enough

Against that sight till we can bear its stress.

Under a vertical sun, the exposed brain

And lidless eye and disemprisoned heart

Less certainly would wither up at once

Than mind, confronted with the truth of Him.

But time and earth case-harden us to live;

The feeblest sense is trusted most; the child

Feels God a moment, ichors o'er the place,

Plays on and grows to be a man like us.

With me, faith means perpetual unbelief

Kept quiet like the snake 'neath Michael's foot

Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe.

Or, if that's too ambitious,—here's my box—

I need the excitation of a pinch

Threatening the torpor of the inside-nose

Nigh on the imminent sneeze that never comes.

"Leave it in peace" advise the simple folk—

Make it aware of peace by itching-fits,

Say I—let doubt occasion still more faith!

MEN AND WOMEN

You'll say, once all believed, man, woman, child,
In that dear middle-age these noodles praise.
How you'd exult if I could put you back
Six hundred years, blot out cosmogony,
Geology, ethnology, what not,
(Greek endings with the little passing-bell
That signifies some faith's about to die)
And set you square with Genesis again,—
When such a traveller told you his last news,
He saw the ark a-top of Ararat
But did not climb there since 'twas getting dusk
And robber-bands infest the mountain's foot! ·
How should you feel, I ask, in such an age,
How act? As other people felt and did;
With soul more blank than this decanter's knob,
Believe—and yet lie, kill, rob, fornicate
Full in belief's face, like the beast you'd be!

No, when the fight begins within himself,
A man's worth something. God stoops o'er his head,
Satan looks up between his feet—both tug—
He's left, himself, in the middle: the soul wakes
And grows. Prolong that battle through his life!
Never leave growing till the life to come!
Here, we've got callous to the Virgin's winks
That used to puzzle people wholesomely—
Men have outgrown the shame of being fools.
What are the laws of Nature, not to bend
If the Church bid them, brother Newman asks.
Up with the Immaculate Conception, then—
On to the rack with faith—is my advice!
Will not that hurry us upon our knees
Knocking our breasts, "It can't be—yet it shall!
Who am I, the worm, to argue with my Pope?
Low things confound the high things!" and so forth.
That's better than acquitting God with grace
As some folks do. He's tried—no case is proved,
Philosophy is lenient—He may go!

You'll say—the old system's not so obsolete

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

But men believe still : ay, but who and where?
King Bomba's lazzaroni foster yet
The sacred flame, so Antonelli writes ;
But even of these, what ragamuffin-saint
Believes God watches him continually,
As he believes in fire that it will burn,
Or rain that it will drench him? Break fire's law,
Sin against rain, although the penalty
Be just singe or soaking? No, he smiles ;
Those laws are laws that can enforce themselves.

The sum of all is—yes, my doubt is great,
My faith's the greater—then my faith's enough.
I have read much, thought much, experienced much,
Yet would die rather than avow my fear
The Naples' liquefaction may be false,
When set to happen by the palace-clock
According to the clouds or dinner-time.
I hear you recommend, I might at least
Eliminate, decrassify my faith
Since I adopt it ; keeping what I must
And leaving what I can—such points as this !
I won't—that is, I can't throw one away.
Supposing there's no truth in what I said
About the need of trials to man's faith,
Still, when you bid me purify the same,
To such a process I discern no end,
Clearing off one excrescence to see two ;
There's ever a next in size, now grown as big,
That meets the knife—I cut and cut again !
First cut the Liquefaction, what comes last
But Fichte's clever cut at God himself ?
Experimentalize on sacred things ?
I trust nor hand nor eye nor heart nor brain
To stop betimes : they all get drunk alike.
The first step, I am master not to take.

You'd find the cutting-process to your taste
As much as leaving growths of lies unpruned,
Nor see more danger in it, you retort.

MEN AND WOMEN

Your taste's worth mine; but my taste proves more
wise

When we consider that the steadfast hold
On the extreme end of the chain of faith
Gives all the advantage, makes the difference,
With the rough purblind mass we seek to rule.
We are their lords, or they are free of us
Just as we tighten or relax that hold.
So, other matters equal, we'll revert
To the first problem—which if solved my way
And thrown into the balance turns the scale—
How we may lead a comfortable life,
How suit our luggage to the cabin's size.

Of course you are remarking all this time
How narrowly and grossly I view life,
Respect the creature-comforts, care to rule
The masses, and regard complacently
"The cabin," in our old phrase! Well, I do.
I act for, talk for, live for this world now,
As this world calls for action, life and talk—
No prejudice to what next world may prove,
Whose new laws and requirements my best pledge
To observe then, is that I observe these now,
Doing hereafter what I do meanwhile.
Let us concede (gratuitously though)
Next life relieves the soul of body, yields
Pure spiritual enjoyments: well, my friend,
Why lose this life in the meantime, since its use
May be to make the next life more intense?

Do you know, I have often had a dream
(Work it up in your next month's article)
Of man's poor spirit in its progress still
Losing true life for ever and a day
Through ever trying to be and ever being
In the evolution of successive spheres,
Before its actual sphere and place of life,
Halfway into the next, which having reached,
It shoots with corresponding foolery

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

Halfway into the next still, on and off !
As when a traveller, bound from north to south,
Scouts fur in Russia—what's its use in France?
In France spurns flannel—where's its need in Spain?
In Spain drops cloth—too cumbrous for Algiers!
Linen goes next, and last the skin itself,
A superfluity at Timbuctoo.
When, through his journey, was the fool at ease?
I'm at ease now, friend—worldly in this world
I take and like its way of life; I think
My brothers who administer the means
Live better for my comfort—that's good too;
And God, if he pronounce upon it all,
Approves my service, which is better still.
If He keep silence,—why for you or me
Or that brute-beast pulled-up in to-day's "Times,"
What odds is't, save to ourselves, what life we lead?

You meet me at this issue—you declare,
All special pleading done with, truth is truth,
And justifies itself by undreamed ways.
You don't fear but it's better, if we doubt,
To say so, acting up to our truth perceived
However feebly. Do then,—act away!
'Tis there I'm on the watch for you! How one acts
Is, both of us agree, our chief concern:
And how you'll act is what I fain would see
If, like the candid person you appear,
You dare to make the most of your life's scheme
As I of mine, live up to its full law
Since there's no higher law that counterchecks.
Put natural religion to the test
You've just demolished the revealed with—quick,
Down to the root of all that checks your will,
All prohibition to lie, kill, and thief
Or even to be an atheistic priest!
Suppose a pricking to incontinence—
Philosophers deduce you chastity
Or shame, from just the fact that at the first
Whoso embraced a woman in the plain,

MEN AND WOMEN

Threw club down, and forewent his brains beside,
So stood a ready victim in the reach
Of any brother-savage club in hand—
Hence saw the use of going out of sight
In wood or cave to prosecute his loves—
I read this in a French book t'other day.
Does law so analyzed coerce you much?
Oh, men spin clouds of fuzz where matters end,
But you who reach where the first thread begins,
You'll soon cut that!—which means you can, but
won't

Through certain instincts, blind, unreasoned-out,
You dare not set aside, you can't tell why,
But there they are, and so you let them rule.
Then, friend, you seem as much a slave as I,
A liar, conscious coward and hypocrite,
Without the good the slave expects to get,
Suppose he has a master after all!
You own your instincts—why what else do I,
Who want, am made for, and must have a God
Ere I can be ought, do ought?—no mere name
Want, but the true thing with what proves its truth,
To wit, a relation from that thing to me,
Touching from head to foot—which touch I feel,
And with it take the rest, this life of ours!
I live my life here; yours you dare not live.

Not as I state it, who (you please subjoin)
Disfigure such a life and call it names,
While, in your mind, remains another way
For simple men: knowledge and power have rights,
But ignorance and weakness have rights too.
There needs no crucial effort to find truth
If here or there or anywhere about—
We ought to turn each side, try hard and see,
And if we can't, be glad we've earned at least
The right, by one laborious proof the more,
To graze in peace earth's pleasant pasturage.
Men are not gods, but, properly, are brutes.
Something we may see, all we cannot see—

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

What need of lying? I say, I see all,
And swear to each detail the most minute
In what I think a man's face—you, mere cloud :
I swear I hear him speak and see him wink,
For fear, if once I drop the emphasis,
Mankind may doubt if there's a cloud at all.
You take the simpler life—ready to see,
Willing to see—for no cloud's worth a face—
And leaving quiet what no strength can move,
And which, who bids you move? who has the right?
I bid you; but you are God's sheep, not mine—
“*Pastor est tui Dominus.*” You find
In these the pleasant pastures of this life
Much you may eat without the least offence,
Much you don't eat because your maw objects,
Much you would eat but that your fellow-flock
Open great eyes at you and even butt,
And thereupon you like your friends so much
You cannot please yourself, offending them—
Though when they seem exorbitantly sheep,
You weigh your pleasure with their butts and kicks
And strike the balance. Sometimes certain fears
Restrain you—real checks since you find them so—
Sometimes you please yourself and nothing checks;
And thus you graze through life with not one lie,
And like it best.

But do you, in truth's name?

If so, you beat—which means—you are not I—
Who needs must make earth mine and feed my fill
Not simply unbutted at, unbickered with,
But motioned to the velvet of the sward
By those obsequious wethers' very selves.
Look at me, sir; my age is double yours.
At yours, I knew beforehand, so enjoyed,
What now I should be—as, permit the word,
I pretty well imagine your whole range
And stretch of tether twenty years to come.
We both have minds and bodies much alike.
In truth's name, don't you want my bishopric,

MEN AND WOMEN

My daily bread, my influence and my state?
You're young, I'm old, you must be old one day;
Will you find then, as I do hour by hour,
Women their lovers kneel to, that cut curls
From your fat lap-dog's ears to grace a brooch—
Dukes, that petition just to kiss your ring—
With much beside you know or may conceive?
Suppose we die to-night: well, here am I,
Such were my gains, life bore this fruit to me,
While writing all the same my articles
On music, poetry, the fictile vase
Found at Albano, or Anacreon's Greek.
But you—the highest honour in your life,
The thing you'll crown yourself with, all your days,
Is—dining here and drinking this last glass
I pour you out in sign of amity
Before we part for ever. Of your power
And social influence, worldly worth in short,
Judge what's my estimation by the fact—
I do not condescend to enjoin, beseech,
Hint secresy on one of all these words!
You're shrewd and know that should you publish it
The world would brand the lie—my enemies first,
“Who'd sneer—the bishop's an arch-hypocrite,
And knave perhaps but not so frank a fool.”
Whereas I should not dare for both my ears
Breathe one such syllable, smile one such smile,
Before my chaplain who reflects myself—
My shade's so much more potent than your flesh.
What's your reward, self-abnegating friend?
Stood you confessed of those exceptional
And privileged great natures that dwarf mine—
A zealot with a mad ideal in reach,
A poet just about to print his ode,
A statesman with a scheme to stop this war,
An artist whose religion is his art,
I should have nothing to object! such men
Carry the fire, all things grow warm to them,
Their drugget's worth my purple, they beat me.
But you,—you're just as little those as I—

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

You, Gigadibs, who, thirty years of age,
Write stately for Blackwood's Magazine,
Believe you see two points in Hamlet's soul
Unseized by the Germans yet—which view you'll
print—

Meantime the best you have to show being still
That lively lightsome article we took
Almost for the true Dickens,—what's the name?
“The Slum and Cellar—or Whitechapel life
Limned after dark!” it made me laugh, I know,
And pleased a month and brought you in ten pounds.
—Success I recognise and compliment,
And therefore give you, if you please, three words
(The card and pencil-scratch is quite enough)
Which whether here, in Dublin, or New York,
Will get you, prompt as at my eyebrow's wink,
Such terms as never you aspired to get
In all our own reviews and some not ours.
Go write your lively sketches—be the first
“Blougram, or The Eccentric Confidence”—
Or better simply say, “The Outward-bound.”
Why, men as soon would throw it in my teeth
As copy and quote the infamy chalked broad
About me on the church-door opposite.
You will not wait for that experience though,
I fancy, howsoever you decide,
To discontinue—not detesting, not
Defaming, but at least—despising me!

Over his wine so smiled and talked his hour
Sylvester Blougram, styled *in partibus*
Episcopus, nec non—(the deuce knows what
It's changed to by our novel hierarchy)
With Gigadibs the literary man,
Who played with spoons, explored his plate's design,
And ranged the olive stones about its edge,
While the great bishop rolled him out his mind.

For Blougram, he believed, say, half he spoke.

MEN AND WOMEN

The other portion, as he shaped it thus
For argumentatory purposes,
He felt his foe was foolish to dispute.
Some arbitrary accidental thoughts
That crossed his mind, amusing because new,
He chose to represent as fixtures there,
Invariable convictions (such they seemed
Beside his interlocutor's loose cards
Flung daily down, and not the same way twice)
While certain hell-deep instincts, man's weak tongue
Is never bold to utter in their truth
Because styled hell-deep ('tis an old mistake
To place hell at the bottom of the earth)
He ignored these,—not having in readiness
Their nomenclature and philosophy :
He said true things, but called them by wrong names.
“On the whole,” he thought, “I justify myself
On every point where cavillers like this
Oppugn my life : he tries one kind of fence—
I close—he's worsted, that's enough for him ;
He's on the ground ! if the ground should break away
I take my stand on, there's a firmer yet
Beneath it, both of us may sink and reach.
His ground was over mine and broke the first.
So let him sit with me this many a year !”

He did not sit five minutes. Just a week
Sufficed his sudden healthy vehemence.
(Something had struck him in the “Outward-bound”
Another way than Blougram's purpose was)
And having bought, not cabin-furniture
But settler's-implements (enough for three)
And started for Australia—there, I hope,
By this time he has tested his first plough,
And studied his last chapter of St. John.

ANDREA DEL SARTO

MEMORABILIA

I.

AH, did you once see Shelley plain,
And did he stop and speak to you?
And did you speak to him again?
How strange it seems, and new!

II.

But you were living before that,
And you are living after,
And the memory I started at—
My starting moves your laughter!

III.

I crossed a moor with a name of its own
And a use in the world no doubt,
Yet a hand's-breath of it shines alone
'Mid the blank miles round about—

IV.

For there I picked up on the heather
And there I put inside my breast
A moulted feather, an eagle-feather—
Well, I forget the rest.

ANDREA DEL SARTO

(CALLED THE "FAULTLESS PAINTER.")

BUT do not let us quarrel any more,
No, my Lucrezia; bear with me for once:
Sit down and all shall happen as you wish.
You turn your face, but does it bring your heart?
I'll work then for your friend's friend, never fear,
Treat his own subject after his own way,

MEN. AND WOMEN

Fix his own time, accept too his own price,
And shut the money into this small hand
When next it takes mine. Will it? tenderly?
Oh, I'll content him,—but to-morrow, Love!
I often am much wearier than you think,
This evening more than usual, and it seems
As if—forgive now—should you let me sit
Here by the window with your hand in mine
And look a half hour forth on Fiesole,
Both of one mind, as married people use,
Quietly, quietly, the evening through,
I might get up to-morrow to my work
Cheerful and fresh as ever. Let us try.
To-morrow how you shall be glad for this!
Your soft hand is a woman of itself,
And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside.
Don't count the time lost, either; you must serve
For each of the five pictures we require—
It saves a model. So! keep looking so—
My serpentining beauty, rounds on rounds!
—How could you ever prick those perfect ears,
Even to put the pearl there! oh, so sweet—
My face, my moon, my everybody's moon,
Which everybody looks on and calls his,
And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn,
While she looks—no one's: very dear, no less!
You smile? why, there's my picture ready made.
There's what we painters call our harmony!
A common greyiness silvers everything,—
All in a twilight, you and I alike
—You, at the point of your first pride in me
(That's gone you know),—but I, at every point;
My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down
To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole.
There's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;
That length of convent-wall across the way
Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;
The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease
And autumn grows, autumn in everything.
Eh? the whole seems to fall into a shape

ANDREA DEL SARTO

As if I saw alike my work and self
And all that I was born to be and do,
A twilight-piece. Love, we are in God's hand.
How strange now, looks the life he makes us lead!
So free we seem, so fettered fast we are:
I feel he laid the fetter: let it lie!
This chamber for example—turn your head—
All that's behind us! you don't understand
Nor care to understand about my art,
But you can hear at least when people speak;
And that cartoon, the second from the door
—It is the thing, Love! so such things should be—
Behold Madonna, I am bold to say.
I can do with my pencil what I know,
What I see, what at bottom of my heart
I wish for, if I ever wish so deep—
Do easily, too—when I say perfectly
I do not boast, perhaps: yourself are judge
Who listened to the Legate's talk last week,
And just as much they used to say in France.
At any rate 'tis easy, all of it,
No sketches first, no studies, that's long past—
I do what many dream of all their lives
—Dream? strive to do, and agonise to do,
And fail in doing. I could count twenty such
On twice your fingers, and not leave this town,
Who strive—you don't know how the others strive
To paint a little thing like that you smeared
Carelessly passing with your robes afloat,
Yet do much less, so much less, some one says,
(I know his name, no matter) so much less!
Well, less is more, Lucrezia! I am judged.
There burns a truer light of God in them,
In their vexed, beating, stuffed and stopped-up brain,
Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to prompt
This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine.
Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I
know,
Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me,
Enter and take their place there sure enough,

MEN AND WOMEN

Though they come back and cannot tell the world.
My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here.
The sudden blood of these men! at a word—
Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too.
I, painting from myself and to myself,
Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame
Or their praise either. Somebody remarks
Morello's outline there is wrongly traced,
His hue mistaken—what of that? or else,
Rightly traced and well ordered—what of that?
Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a Heaven for? all is silver-grey
Placid and perfect with my art—the worse!
I know both what I want and what might gain—
And yet how profitless to know, to sigh
“Had I been two, another and myself,
Our head would have o'erlooked the world!” No
doubt.

Yonder's a work, now, of that famous youth
The Urbinate who died five years ago.
(’Tis copied, George Vasari sent it me.)
Well, I can fancy how he did it all,
Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see,
Reaching, that Heaven might so replenish him,
Above and through his art—for it gives way;
That arm is wrongly put—and there again—
A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines,
Its body, so to speak! its soul is right,
He means right—that, a child may understand.
Still, what an arm! and I could alter it.
But all the play, the insight and the stretch—
Out of me! out of me! And wherefore out?
Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul,
We might have risen to Rafael, I and you.
Nay, Love, you did give all I asked, I think—
More than I merit, yes, by many times.
But had you—oh, with the same perfect brow,
And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,
And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird
The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare—

ANDREA DEL SARTO

Had you, with these the same, but brought a mind!
Some women do so. Had the mouth there urged
"God and the glory! never care for gain.
The present by the future, what is that?
Live for fame, side by side with Angelo—
Rafael is waiting. Up to God all three!"
I might have done it for you. So it seems—
Perhaps not. All is as God over-rules.
Beside, incentives come from the soul's self;
The rest avail not. Why do I need you?
What wife had Rafael, or has Angelo?
In this world, who can do a thing, will not—
And who would do it, cannot, I perceive:
Yet the will's somewhat—somewhat, too, the power—
And thus we half-men struggle. At the end,
God, I conclude, compensates, punishes.
'Tis safer for me, if the award be strict,
That I am something underrated here,
Poor this long while, despised, to speak the truth.
I dared not, do you know, leave home all day,
For fear of chancing on the Paris lords.
The best is when they pass and look aside;
But they speak sometimes; I must bear it all.
Well may they speak! That Francis, that first time,
And that long festal year at Fontainebleau!
I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,
Put on the glory, Rafael's daily wear,
In that humane great monarch's golden look,—
One finger in his beard or twisted curl
Over his mouth's good mark that made the smile,
One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,
The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,
[I] painting proudly with his breath on me,
All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,
Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of souls
Profuse, my hand kept plying by those hearts,—
And, best of all, this, this, this face beyond,
This in the back-ground, waiting on my work,
To crown the issue with a last reward!
A good time, was it not, my kingly days?

MEN AND WOMEN

And had you not grown restless—but I know—
'Tis done and past; 'twas right, my instinct said;
Too live the life grew, golden and not grey—
And I'm the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt
Out of the grange whose four walls make his world.
How could it end in any other way?
You called me, and I came home to your heart.
The triumph was to have ended there—then if
I reached it ere the triumph, what is lost?
Let my hands frame your face in your hair's gold,
You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine!
"Rafael did this, Andrea painted that—
The Roman's is the better when you pray,
But still the other's Virgin was his wife—"
Men will excuse me. I am glad to judge
Both pictures in your presence; clearer grows
My better fortune, I resolve to think.
For, do you know, Lucrezia, as God lives,
Said one day Angelo, his very self,
To Rafael . . . I have known it all these years . . .
(When the young man was flaming out his thoughts
Upon a palace-wall for Rome to see,
Too lifted up in heart because of it)
"Friend, there's a certain sorry little scrub
Goes up and down our Florence, none cares how,
Who, were he set to plan and execute
As you are pricked on by your popes and kings,
Would bring the sweat into that brow of yours!"
To Rafael's!—And indeed the arm is wrong.
I hardly dare—yet, only you to see,
Give the chalk here—quick, thus the line should go!
Ay, but the soul! he's Rafael! rub it out!
Still, all I care for, if he spoke the truth,
(What he? why, who but Michael Angelo?
Do you forget already words like those?)
If really there was such a chance, so lost,
Is, whether you're—not grateful—but more pleased.
Well, let me think so. And you smile indeed!
This hour has been an hour! Another smile?
If you would sit thus by me every night

ANDREA DEL SARTO

I should work better, do you comprehend?
I mean that I should earn more, give you more.
See, it is settled dusk now; there's a star;
Morello's gone, the watch-lights shew the wall,
The cue-owls speak the name we call them by.
Come from the window, Love,—come in, at last,
Inside the melancholy little house
We built to be so gay with. God is just.
King Francis may forgive me. Oft at nights
When I look up from painting, eyes tired out,
The walls become illumined, brick from brick
Distinct, instead of mortar fierce bright gold,
That gold of his I did cement them with!
Let us but love each other. Must you go?
That Cousin here again? he waits outside?
Must see you—you, and not with me? Those loans
More gaming debts to pay? you smiled for that?
Well, let smiles buy me! have you more to spend?
While hand and eye and something of a heart
Are left me, work's my ware, and what's it worth?
I'll pay my fancy. Only let me sit
The grey remainder of the evening out,
Idle, you call it, and muse perfectly
How I could paint were I but back in France,
One picture, just one more—the Virgin's face,
Not yours this time! I want you at my side
To hear them—that is, Michael Angelo—
Judge all I do and tell you of its worth.
Will you? To-morrow, satisfy your friend.
I take the subjects for his corridor,
Finish the portrait out of hand—there, there,
And throw him in another thing or two
If he demurs; the whole should prove enough
To pay for this same Cousin's freak. Beside,
What's better and what's all I care about,
Get you the thirteen scudi for the ruff.
Love, does that please you? Ah, but what does he,
The Cousin! what does he to please you more?

I am grown peaceful as old age to-night.

MEN AND WOMEN

I regret little, I would change still less.
Since there my past life lies, why alter it?
The very wrong to Francis! it is true
I took his coin, was tempted and complied,
And built this house and sinned, and all is said.
My father and my mother died of want.
Well, had I riches of my own? you see
How one gets rich! Let each one bear his lot.
They were born poor, lived poor, and poor they died:
And I have laboured somewhat in my time
And not been paid profusely. Some good son
Paint my two hundred pictures—let him try!
No doubt, there's something strikes a balance. Yes,
You loved me quite enough, it seems to-night.
This must suffice me here. What would one have?
In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance—
Four great walls in the New Jerusalem
Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
For Leonard, Rafael, Angelo and me
To cover—the three first without a wife,
While I have mine! So—still they overcome
Because there's still Lucrezia,—as I choose.

Again the Cousin's whistle! Go, my Love.

BEFORE

I.

Let them fight it out, friend! things have gone too far.
God must judge the couple! leave them as they are
—Whichever one's the guiltless, to his glory,
And whichever one the guilt's with, to my story.

II.

Why, you would not bid men, sunk in such a slough,
Strike no arm out further, stick and stink as now,
Leaving right and wrong to settle the embroilment,
Heaven with snaky Hell, in torture and entoilment?

BEFORE

III.

Which of them's the culprit, how must he conceive
God's the queen he caps to, laughing in his sleeve!
'Tis but decent to profess oneself beneath her.
Still, one must not be too much in earnest either.

IV.

Better sin the whole sin, sure that God observes,
Then go live his life out! life will try his nerves,
When the sky which noticed all, makes no disclosure,
And the earth keeps up her terrible composure.

V.

Let him pace at pleasure, past the walls of rose,
Pluck their fruits when grape-trees graze him as he
goes.

For he 'gins to guess the purpose of the garden,
With the sly mute thing beside there for a warden.

VI.

What's the leopard-dog-thing, constant to his side,
A leer and lie in every eye on its obsequious hide?
When will come an end of all the mock obeisance,
And the price appear that pays for the misfeasance?

VII.

So much for the culprit. Who's the martyred man?
Let him bear one stroke more, for be sure he can.
He that strove thus evil's lump with good to leaven,
Let him give his blood at last and get his heaven.

VIII.

All or nothing, stake it! trusts he God or no?
Thus far and no farther? farther? be it so.
Now, enough of your chicane of prudent pauses,
Sage provisos, sub-intents, and saving-clauses.

IX.

Ah, "forgive" you bid him? While God's champion lives,
Wrong shall be resisted: dead, why he forgives.

MEN AND WOMEN

But you must not end my friend ere you begin him;
Evil stands not crowned on earth, while breath is in him.

X.

Once more—Will the wronger, at this last of all,
Dare to say “I did wrong,” rising in his fall?
No?—Let go, then—both the fighters to their places—
While I count three, step you back as many paces.

AFTER

TAKE the cloak from his face, and at first
Let the corpse do its worst.
How he lies in his rights of a man!
Death has done all death can.
And absorbed in the new life he leads,
He recks not, he heeds
Nor his wrong nor my vengeance—both strike
On his senses alike,
And are lost in the solemn and strange
Surprise of the change.
Ha, what avails death to erase
His offence, my disgrace?
I would we were boys as of old
In the field, by the fold—
His outrage, God's patience, man's scorn
Were so easily borne.

I stand here now, he lies in his place—
Cover the face.

IN THREE DAYS

I.

So, I shall see her in three days
And just one night, but nights are short,
Then two long hours, and that is morn.
See how I come, unchanged, unworn—

IN THREE DAYS

Feel, where my life broke off from thine,
How fresh the splinters keep and fine,—
Only a touch and we combine!

II.

Too long, this time of year, the days!
But nights—at least the nights are short.
As night shows where her one moon is,
A hand's-breadth of pure light and bliss,
So, life's night gives my lady birth
And my eyes hold her! what is worth
The rest of heaven, the rest of earth?

III.

O loaded curls, release your store
Of warmth and scent as once before
The tingling hair did, lights and darks
Out-breaking into fairy sparks
When under curl and curl I pried
After the warmth and scent inside
Thro' lights and darks how manifold—
The dark inspired, the light controlled!
As early Art einbrowned the gold.

IV.

What great fear—should one say, “Three days
That change the world, might change as well
Your fortune; and if joy delays,
Be happy that no worse befell.”
What small fear—if another says,
“Three days and one short night beside
May throw no shadow on your ways;
But years must teem with change untried,
With chance not easily defied,
With an end somewhere undescried.”
No fear!—or if a fear be born
This minute, it dies out in scorn.
Fear? I shall see her in three days
And one night, now the nights are short,
Then just two hours, and that is morn.

MEN AND WOMEN

IN A YEAR

I.

NEVER any more
While I live,
Need I hope to see his face
As before.
Once his love grown chill,
Mine may strive—
Bitterly we re-embrace,
Single still.

II.

Was it something said,
Something done,
Vexed him? was it touch of hand,
Turn of head?
Strange! that very way
Love begun.
I as little understand
Love's decay.

III.

When I sewed or drew,
I recall
How he looked as if I sang,
—Sweetly too.
If I spoke a word,
First of all
Up his cheek the colour sprang,
Then he heard.

IV.

Sitting by my side,
At my feet,
So he breathed the air I breathed,
Satisfied!

IN A YEAR

I, too, at love's brim
Touched the sweet :
I would die if death bequeathed
Sweet to him.

V.

"Speak, I love thee best!"
He exclaimed,
"Let my love thy own foretell,—"
I confessed :
"Clasp my heart on thine
Now unblamed,
Since upon thy soul as well
Hangeth mine!"

VI.

Was it wrong to own,
Being truth?
Why should all the giving prove
His alone?
I had wealth and ease,
Beauty, youth—
Since my lover gave me love,
I gave these.

VII.

That was all I meant,
—To be just,
And the passion I had raised
To content.
Since he chose to change
Gold for dust,
If I gave him what he praised
Was it strange?

VIII.

Would he loved me yet,
On and on,
While I found some way undreamed
—Paid my debt!

MEN AND WOMEN

Gave more life and more,
Till, all gone,
He should smile "She never seemed
Mine before.

IX.

"What—she felt the while,
Must I think?
Love's so different with us men,"
He should smile.
"Dying for my sake—
White and pink!
Can't we touch these bubbles then
But they break?"

X.

Dear, the pang is brief.
Do thy part,
Have thy pleasure. How perplex
Grows belief!
Well, this cold clay clod
Was man's heart.
Crumble it—and what comes next?
Is it God?

OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE

I.

The morn when first it thunders in March,
The eel in the pond gives a leap, they say.
As I leaned and looked over the aloed arch
Of the villa-gate, this warm March day,
No flash snapt, no dumb thunder rolled
In the valley beneath, where, white and wide,
Washed by the morning's water-gold,
Florence lay out on the mountain-side.

OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE

II.

River and bridge and street and square
Lay mine, as much at my beck and call,
Through the live translucent bath of air,
As the sights in a magic crystal ball.
And of all I saw and of all I praised,
The most to praise and the best to see,
Was the startling bell-tower Giotto raised:
But why did it more than startle me?

III.

Giotto, how, with that soul of yours,
Could you play me false who loved you so?
Some slights if a certain heart endures
It feels, I would have your fellows know!
Faith—I perceive not why I should care
To break a silence that suits them best,
But the thing grows somewhat hard to bear
When I find a Giotto join the rest.

IV.

On the arch where olives overhead
Print the blue sky with twig and leaf,
(That sharp-curled leaf they never shed)
'Twixt the aloes I used to lean in chief,
And mark through the winter afternoons,
By a gift God grants me now and then,
In the mild decline of those suns like moons,
Who walked in Florence, besides her men.

V.

They might chirp and chaffer, come and go
For pleasure or profit, her men alive—
My business was hardly with them, I trow,
But with empty cells of the human hive;
—With the chapter-room, the cloister-porch,
The church's apsis, aisle or nave,
Its crypt, one fingers along with a torch—
Its face, set full for the sun to shave.

MEN AND WOMEN

VI.

Wherever a fresco peels and drops,
Wherever an outline weakens and wanes
Till the latest life in the painting stops,
Stands One whom each fainter pulse-tick pains !
One, wishful each scrap should clutch its brick,
Each tinge not wholly escape the plaster,
—A lion who dies of an ass's kick,
The wronged great soul of an ancient Master.

VII.

For oh, this world and the wrong it does !
They are safe in heaven with their backs to it,
The Michaels and Rafaels, you hum and buzz
Round the works of, you of the little wit !
Do their eyes contract to the earth's old scope,
Now that they see God face to face,
And have all attained to be poets, I hope ?
'Tis their holiday now, in any case.

VIII.

Much they reckon of your praise and you !
But the wronged great souls—can they be quit
Of a world where all their work is to do,
Where you style them, you of the little wit,
Old Master this and Early the other,
Not dreaming that Old and New are fellows,
That a younger succeeds to an elder brother,
Da Vincis derive in good time from Dellos.

IX.

And here where your praise would yield returns
And a handsome word or two give help,
Here, after your kind, the mastiff girns
And the puppy pack of poodles yelp.
What, not a word for Stefano there
—Of brow once prominent and starry,
Called Nature's ape and the world's despair
For his peerless painting (see Vasari) ?

OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE

X.

There he stands now. Study, my friends,
What a man's work comes to! so he plans it,
Performs it, perfects it, makes amends
For the toiling and moiling, and there's its transit!
Happier the thrifty blind-folk labour,
With upturned eye while the hand is busy,
Not sidling a glance at the coin of their neighbour!
'Tis looking downward makes one dizzy.

XI.

If you knew their work you would deal your dole.
May I take upon me to instruct you?
When Greek Art ran and reached the goal,
Thus much had the world to boast *in fructu*—
The truth of Man, as by God first spoken,
Which the actual generations garble,
Was re-uttered,—and Soul (which Limbs betoken)
And Limbs (Soul informs) were made new in
marble.

XII.

So you saw yourself as you wished you were,
As you might have been, as you cannot be;
And bringing your own shortcomings there,
You grew content in your poor degree
With your little power, by those statues' godhead,
And your little scope, by their eyes' full sway,
And your little grace, by their grace embodied,
And your little date, by their forms that stay.

XIII.

You would fain be kinglier, say than I am?
Even so, you would not sit like Theseus.
You'd fain be a model? the Son of Priam
Has yet the advantage in arms' and knees' use.
You're wroth—can you slay your snake like Apollo?
You're grieved—still Niobe's the grander!
You live—there's the Racers' frieze to follow—
You die—there's the dying Alexander

MEN AND WOMEN

XIV.

So, testing your weakness by their strength,
Your meagre charms by their rounded beauty,
Measured by Art in your breadth and length,
You learn—to submit is the worsted's duty.
—When I say “you” ’tis the common soul,
The collective, I mean—the race of Man
That receives life in parts to live in a whole,
And grow here according to God's own plan.

XV.

Growth came when, looking your last on them all,
You turned your eyes inwardly one fine day
And cried with a start—What if we so small
Are greater, ay, greater the while than they!
Are they perfect of lineament, perfect of stature?
In both, of such lower types are we
Precisely because of our wider nature;
For time, theirs—ours, for eternity.

XVI.

To-day's brief passion limits their range,
It seethes with the morrow for us and more.
They are perfect—how else? they shall never change:
We are faulty—why not? we have time in store.
The Artificer's hand is not arrested
With us—we are rough-hewn, no-wise polished:
They stand for our copy, and, once invested
With all they can teach, we shall see them
abolished.

XVII.

'Tis a life-long toil till our lump be leaven—
The better! what's come to perfection perishes.
Things learned on earth, we shall practise in heaven.
Works done least rapidly, Art most cherishes.
Thyself shall afford the example, Giotto!
Thy one work, not to decrease or diminish,
Done at a stroke, was just (was it not?) “O!”
Thy great Campanile is still to finish.

OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE

XVIII.

Is it true, we are now, and shall be hereafter,
And what—is depending on life's one minute?
Hails heavenly cheer or infernal laughter
Our first step out of the gulf or in it?
And Man, this step within his endeavour,
His face, have no more play and action
Than joy which is crystallized for ever,
Or grief, an eternal petrification!

XIX.

On which I conclude, that the early painters,
To cries of "Greek Art and what more wish
you?"—
Replied, "Become now self-acquainters,
And paint man, man,—whatever the issue!
Make the hopes shine through the flesh they fray,
New fears aggrandise the rags and tatters.
So bring the invisible full into play,
Let the visible go to the dogs—what matters?"

XX.

Give these, I say, full honour and glory
For daring so much, before they well did it.
The first of the new, in our race's story,
Beats the last of the old, 'tis no idle quiddit.
The worthies began a revolution
Which if on the earth we intend to acknowledge
Honour them now—(ends my allocution)
Nor confer our degree when the folks leave
college.

XXI.

There's a fancy some lean to and others hate—
That, when this life is ended, begins
New work for the soul in another state,
Where it strives and gets weary, loses and wins—
Where the strong and the weak, this world's
congeries,
Repeat in large what they practised in small,

MEN AND WOMEN

Through life after life in unlimited series ;
Only the scale's to be changed, that's all.

XXII.

Yet I hardly know. When a soul has seen
By the means of Evil that Good is best,
And through earth and its noise, what is heaven's
serene,—

When its faith in the same has stood the test—
Why, the child grown man, you burn the rod,
The uses of labour are surely done.
There remaineth a rest for the people of God,
And I have had troubles enough for one.

XXIII.

But at any rate I have loved the season
Of Art's spring-birth so dim and dewy,
My sculptor is Nicolo the Pisan ;
My painter—who but Cimabue ?
Nor ever was man of them all indeed,
From these to Ghiberti and Ghirlandajo,
Could say that he missed my critic-meed.
So now to my special grievance—heigh ho !

XXIV.

Their ghosts now stand, as I said before,
Watching each fresco flaked and rasped,
Blocked up, knocked out, or whitewashed o'er
—No getting again what the church has grasped !
The works on the wall must take their chance,
“Works never conceded to England's thick
clime !”
(I hope they prefer their inheritance
Of a bucketful of Italian quick-lime.)

XXV.

When they go at length, with such a shaking
Of heads o'er the old delusions, sadly
Each master his way through the black streets
taking,

OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE

Where many a lost work breathes though badly—
Why don't they bethink them of who has merited?
Why not reveal, while their pictures dree
Such doom, that a captive's to be out-ferreted?
Why do they never remember me?

XXVI.

Not that I expect the great Bigordi
Nor Sandro to hear me, chivalric, bellicose;
Nor wronged Lippino—and not a word I
Say of a scrap of Fra Angelico's.
But are you too fine, Taddeo Gaddi,
To grant me a taste of your intonaco—
Some Jerome that seeks the heaven with a sad eye?
No churlish saint, Lorenzo Monaco?

XXVII.

Could not the ghost with the close red cap,
My Pollajolo, the twice a craftsman,
Save me a sample, give me the hap
Of a muscular Christ that shows the draughtsman?
No Virgin by him, the somewhat petty,
Of finical touch and tempera crumbly—
Could not Alesso Baldovinetti
Contribute so much, I ask him humbly?

XXVIII.

Margheritone of Arezzo,
With the grave-clothes garb and swaddling barret,
(Why purse up mouth and beak in a pet so,
You bald, saturnine, poll-clawed parrot?)
No poor glimmering Crucifixion,
Where in the foreground kneels the donor?
If such remain, as is my conviction,
The hoarding does you but little honour.

XXIX.

They pass: for them the panels may thrill,
The tempera grow alive and tinglish—
Rot or are left to the mercies still

MEN AND WOMEN

Of dealers and stealers, Jews and the English!
Seeing mere money's worth in their prize,
Who sell it to some one calm as Zeno
At naked Art, and in ecstasies
Before some clay-cold, vile Carlino!

XXX.

No matter for these! But Giotto, you,
Have you allowed, as the town-tongues babble it,
Never! it shall not be counted true—
That a certain precious little tablet
Which Buonarroto eyed like a lover,—
Buried so long in oblivion's womb,
Was left for another than I to discover,—
Turns up at last, and to whom?—to whom?

XXXI.

I, that have haunted the dim San Spirito,
(Or was it rather the Ognissanti?)
Stood on the altar-steps, patient and weary too!
Nay, I shall have it yet, *detur amanti!*
My Koh-i-noor—or (if that's a platitude)
Jewel of Giamschid, the Persian Sofi's eye!
So, in anticipative gratitude,
What if I take up my hope and prophesy?

XXXII.

When the hour is ripe, and a certain dotard
Pitched, no parcel that needs invoicing,
To the worse side of the Mont St. Gothard,
Have, to begin by way of rejoicing,
None of that shooting the sky (blank cartridge),
No civic guards, all plumes and lacquer,
Hunting Radetsky's soul like a partridge
Over Morello with squib and cracker.

XXXIII.

We'll shoot this time better game and bag 'em hot—
No display at the stone of Dante,
But a kind of [sober] Witan-agemot

OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE

("Casa Guidi," quod videas ante)

To ponder Freedom restored to Florence,
How Art may return that departed with her.
Go, hated house, go each trace of the Lorraine's!
And bring us the days of Orgagna hither.

XXXIV.

How we shall prologuise, how we shall perorate,
Say fit things upon art and history—
Set truth at blood-heat and the false at a zero rate
Make of the want of the age no mystery!
Contrast the fructuous and sterile eras,
Show, monarchy its uncouth cub licks
Out of the bear's shape to the chimæra's—
Pure Art's birth being still the republic's!

XXXV.

Then one shall propose (in a speech, curt Tuscan,
Sober, expurgate, spare of an "*issimo*,")
Ending our half-told tale of Cambuscan,
Turning the Bell-tower's alt altissimo.
And fine as the beak of a young beccaccia
The Campanile, the Duomo's fit ally,
Soars up in gold its full fifty braccia,
Completing Florence, as Florence, Italy.

XXXVI.

Shall I be alive that morning the scaffold
Is broken away, and the long-pent fire
Like the golden hope of the world unbattled
Springs from its sleep, and up goes the spire—
As, "God and the People" plain for its motto,
Thence the new tricolor flaps at the sky?
Foreseeing the day that vindicates Giotto
And Florence together, the first am I!

MEN AND WOMEN

IN A BALCONY

FIRST PART

CONSTANCE *and* NORBERT

NORBERT

Now.

CONSTANCE

Not now.

NORBERT

Give me them again, those hands—
Put them upon my forehead, how it throbs!
Press them before my eyes, the fire comes through.
You cruellest, you dearest in the world,
Let me! the Queen must grant whate'er I ask—
How can I gain you and not ask the Queen?
There she stays waiting for me, here stand you.
Some time or other this was to be asked,
Now is the one time—what I ask, I gain—
Let me ask now, Love!

CONSTANCE

Do, and ruin us.

NORBERT

Let it be now, Love! All my soul breaks forth.
How I do love you! give my love its way!
A man can have but one life and one death,
One heaven, one hell. Let me fulfil my fate—
Grant me my heaven now. Let me know you
mine,
Prove you mine, write my name upon your brow,

IN A BALCONY

Hold you and have you, and then die away
If God please, with completion in my soul.

CONSTANCE

I am not yours then? how content this man?
I am not his, who change into himself,
Have passed into his heart and beat its beats,
Who give my hands to him, my eyes, my hair,
Give all that was of me away to him
So well, that now, my spirit turned his own,
Takes part with him against the woman here,
Bids him not stumble at so mere a straw
As caring that the world be cognisant
How he loves her and how she worships him.
You have this woman, not as yet that world.
Go on, I bid, nor stop to care for me
By saving what I cease to care about,
The courtly name and pride of circumstance—
The name you'll pick up and be cumbered with
Just for the poor parade's sake, nothing more;
Just that the world may slip from under you—
Just that the world may cry "So much for him—
The man predestined to the heap of crowns!
There goes his chance of winning one, at least."

NORBERT

The world!

CONSTANCE

You love it. Love me quite as well,
And see if I shall pray for this in vain!
Why must you ponder what it knows or thinks?

NORBERT

You pray for—what, in vain?

CONSTANCE

Oh my heart's heart,
How I do love you, Norbert!—that is right!
But listen, or I take my hands away.

MEN AND WOMEN

You say, "let it be now"—you would go now
And tell the Queen, perhaps six steps from us,
You love me—so you do, thank God!

NORBERT

Thank God!

CONSTANCE

Yes, Norbert,—but you fain would tell your love,
And, what succeeds the telling, ask of her
My hand. Now take this rose and look at it,
Listening to me. You are the minister,
The Queen's first favourite, nor without a cause.
To-night completes your wonderful year's-work
(This palace-feast is held to celebrate)
Made memorable by her life's success,
That junction of two crowns on her sole head
Her house had only dreamed of anciently.
That this mere dream is grown a stable truth
To-night's feast makes authentic. Whose the
praise?

Whose genius, patience, energy, achieved
What turned the many heads and broke the
hearts?

You are the fate—your minute's in the heaven.
Next comes the Queen's turn. Name your own
reward!

With leave to clench the past, chain the to-come,
Put out an arm and touch and take the sun
And fix it ever full-faced on your earth,
Possess yourself supremely of her life,
You choose the single thing she will not grant—
The very declaration of which choice
Will turn the scale and neutralise your work.
At best she will forgive you, if she can.
You think I'll let you choose—her cousin's hand?

NORBERT

Wait. First, do you retain your old belief
The Queen is generous,—nay, is just?

IN A BALCONY

CONSTANCE

There, there!

So men make women love them, while they know
No more of women's hearts than . . . look you here,
You that are just and generous beside,
Make it your own case. For example now,
I'll say—I let you kiss me and hold my hands—
Why? do you know why? I'll instruct you, then—
The kiss, because you have a name at court,
This hand and this, that you may shut in each
A jewel, if you please to pick up such.
That's horrible! Apply it to the Queen—
Suppose, I am the Queen to whom you speak.
“I was a nameless man: you needed me:
Why did I proffer you my aid? there stood
A certain pretty Cousin by your side.
Why did I make such common cause with you?
Access to her had not been easy else.
You give my labours here abundant praise:
'Faith, labour, while she overlooked, grew play.
How shall your gratitude discharge itself?
Give me her hand!”

NORBERT

And still I urge the same.
Is the Queen just? just—generous or no!

CONSTANCE

Yes, just. You love a rose—no harm in that—
But was it for the rose's sake or mine
You put it in your bosom? mine, you said—
Then mine you still must say or else be false.
You told the Queen you served her for herself:
If so, to serve her was to serve yourself
She thinks, for all your unbelieving face!
I know her. In the hall, six steps from us,
One sees the twenty pictures—there's a life
Better than life—and yet no life at all;
Conceive her born in such a magic dome,

MEN AND WOMEN

Pictures all round her! why, she sees the world
Can recognise its given things and facts,
The fight of giants or the feast of gods,
Sages in senate, beauties at the bath,
Chaces and battles, the whole earth's display,
Landscape and sea-piece, down to flowers and fruit—
And who shall question that she knows them all
In better semblance than the things outside?
Yet bring into the silent gallery
Some live thing to contrast in breath and blood,
Some lion, with the painted lion there—
You think she'll understand composedly?
—Say, "that's his fellow in the hunting-piece
Yonder, I've turned to praise a hundred times?"
Not so. Her knowledge of our actual earth,
Its hopes and fears, concerns and sympathies,
Must be too far, too mediate, too unreal.
The real exists for us outside, not her—
How should it, with that life in these four walls,
That father and that mother, first to last
No father and no mother—friends, a heap,
Lovers, no lack—a husband in due time,
And everyone of them alike a lie!
Things painted by a Rubens out of nought
Into what kindness, friendship, love should be;
All better, all more grandiose than life,
Only no life; mere cloth and surface-paint
You feel while you admire. How should she feel?
And now that she has stood thus fifty years
The sole spectator in that gallery,
You think to bring this warm real struggling love
In to her of a sudden, and suppose
She'll keep her state untroubled? Here's the truth—
She'll apprehend its value at a glance,
Prefer it to the pictured loyalty!
You only have to say "so men are made,
For this they act, the thing has many names
But this the right one—and now, Queen, be just!"
And life slips back—you lose her at the word—
You do not even for amends gain me.

IN A BALCONY

He will not understand! oh, Norbert, Norbert,
Do you not understand?

NORBERT

The Queen's the Queen,

I am myself—no picture, but alive
In every nerve and every muscle, here
At the palace-window or in the people's street,
As she in the gallery where the pictures glow.
The good of life is precious to us both.
She cannot love—what do I want with rule?
When first I saw your face a year ago
I knew my life's good—my soul heard one voice
"The woman yonder, there's no use of life
But just to obtain her! heap earth's woes in one
And bear them—make a pile of all earth's joys
And spurn them, as they help or help not here;
Only, obtain her!"—How was it to be?
I found she was the cousin of the Queen;
I must then serve the Queen to get to her—
No other way. Suppose there had been one,
And I by saying prayers to some white star
With promise of my body and my soul
Might gain you,—should I pray the star or no?
Instead, there was the Queen to serve! I served,
And did what other servants failed to do.
Neither she sought nor I declared my end.
Her good is hers, my recompense be mine,
And let me name you as that recompense.
She dreamed that such a thing could never be?
Let her wake now. She thinks there was some cause—
The love of power, of fame, pure loyalty?
—Perhaps she fancies men wear out their lives
Chasing such shades. Then I've a fancy too.
I worked because I want you with my soul—
I therefore ask your hand. Let it be now.

CONSTANCE

Had I not loved you from the very first,
Were I not yours, could we not steal out thus

MEN AND WOMEN

So wickedly, so wildly, and so well,
You might be thus impatient. What's conceived
Of us without here, by the folks within?
Where are you now? immersed in cares of state—
Where am I now?—intent on festal robes—
We two, embracing under death's spread hand!
What was this thought for, what this scruple of
yours

Which broke the council up, to bring about
One minute's meeting in the corridor?
And then the sudden sleights, long secresies,
The plots inscrutable, deep telegraphs,
Long-planned chance-meetings, hazards of a look,
"Does she know? does she not know? saved or
lost?"

A year of this compression's ecstasy
All goes for nothing? you would give this up
For the old way, the open way, the world's,
His way who beats, and his who sells his wife?
What tempts you? their notorious happiness,
That you're ashamed of ours? The best you'll get
Will be, the Queen grants all that you require,
Concedes the cousin, and gets rid of you
And her at once, and gives us ample leave
To live as our five hundred happy friends.
The world will show us with officious hand
Our chamber-entry and stand sentinel,
When we so oft have stolen across her traps!
Get the world's warrant, ring the falcon's foot,
And make it duty to be bold and swift,
When long ago 'twas nature. Have it so!
He never hawked by rights till flung from fist?
Oh, the man's thought!—no woman's such a fool.

NORBERT

Yes, the man's thought and my thought, which is
more—

One made to love you, let the world take note.
Have I done worthy work? be love's the praise,
Though hampered by restrictions, barred against

IN A BALCONY

By set forms, blinded by forced secresies.
Set free my love, and see what love will do
Shown in my life—what work will spring from that!
The world is used to have its business done
On other grounds, find great effects produced
For power's sake, fame's sake, motives you have
named.

So good. But let my low ground shame their high.
Truth is the strong thing. Let man's life be true!
And love's the truth of mine. Time prove the rest!
I choose to have you stamped all over me,
Your name upon my forehead and my breast,
You, from the sword's blade to the ribbon's edge,
That men may see, all over, you in me—
That pale loves may die out of their pretence
In face of mine, shames thrown on love fall off—
Permit this, Constance! Love has been so long
Subdued in me, eating me through and through,
That now it's all of me and must have way.
Think of my work, that chaos of intrigues,
Those hopes and fears, surprises and delays,
That long endeavour, earnest, patient, slow,
Trembling at last to its assured result—
Then think of this revulsion. I resume
Life, after death, (it is no less than life
After such long unlovely labouring days)
And liberate to beauty life's great need
Of the beautiful, which, while it prompted work,
Suppress itself erewhile. This eve's the time—
This eve intense with yon first trembling star
We seem to pant and reach; scarce ought between
The earth that rises and the heaven that bends—
All nature self-abandoned—every tree
Flung as it will, pursuing its own thoughts
And fixed so, every flower and every weed,
No pride, no shame, no victory, no defeat:
All under God, each measured by itself!
These statues round us, each abrupt, distinct,
The strong in strength, the weak in weakness fixed,
The Muse for ever wedded to her lyre,

MEN AND WOMEN

The Nymph to her fawn, the Silence to her rose,
And God's approval on his universe!
Let us do so—aspire to live as these
In harmony with truth, ourselves being true.
Take the first way, and let the second come,
My first is to possess myself of you;
The music sets the march-step—forward then!
And there's the Queen, I go to claim you of,
The world to witness, wonder and applaud.
Our flower of life breaks open. No delay!

CONSTANCE

And so shall we be ruined, both of us.
Norbert, I know her to the skin and bone—
You do not know her, were not born to it,
To feel what she can see or cannot see.
Love, she is generous,—ay, despite your Smile,
Generous as you are. For, in that thin frame
Pain-twisted, punctured through and through with
cares,
There lived a lavish soul until it starved
Debarred all healthy food. Look to the soul—
Pity that, stoop to that, ere you begin
(The true man's way) on justice and your rights,
Exactions and acquittance of the past.
Begin so—see what justice she will deal!
We women hate a debt as men a gift.
Suppose her some poor keeper of a school
Whose business is to sit thro' summer-months
And dole out children's leave to go and play,
Herself superior to such lightness—she
In the arm-chair's state and pædagogic pomp,
To the life, the laughter, sun and youth outside—
We wonder such an one looks black on us?
I do not bid you wake her tenderness,
—That were vain truly—none is left to wake—
But, let her think her justice is engaged
To take the shape of tenderness, and mark
If she'll not coldly do its warmest deed!
Does she love me, I ask you? not a whit.

IN A BALCONY

Yet, thinking that her justice was engaged
To help a kinswoman, she took me up—
Did more on that bare ground than other loves
Would do on greater argument. For me,
I have no equivalent of that cold kind
To pay her with; my love alone to give
If I give anything. I give her love.
I feel I ought to help her, and I will.
So for her sake, as yours, I tell you twice
That women hate a debt as men a gift.
If I were you, I could obtain this grace—
Would lay the whole I did to love's account,
Nor yet be very false as courtiers go—
Declare that my success was recompense;
It would be so, in fact: what were it else?
And then, once loosed her generosity
As you will mark it—then,—were I but you
To turn it, let it seem to move itself,
And make it give the thing I really take,
Accepting so, in the poor cousin's hand,
All value as the next thing to the queen—
Since none loves her directly, none dares that!
A shadow of a thing, a name's mere echo
Suffices those who miss the name and thing;
You pick up just a ribbon she has worn
To keep in proof how near her breath you came.
Say I'm so near I seem a piece of her—
Ask for me that way—(oh, you understand)
And find the same gift yielded with a grace,
Which if you make the least show to extort
—You'll see! and when you have ruined both of us,
Dis[s]ertate on the Queen's ingratitude!

NORBERT

Then, if I turn it that way, you consent?
'Tis not my way; I have more hope in truth.
Still if you won't have truth—why, this indeed,
Is scarcely false, I'll so express the sense.
Will you remain here?

MEN AND WOMEN

CONSTANCE

O best heart of mine,
How I have loved you! then, you take my way?
Are mine as you have been her minister,
Work out my thought, give it effect for me,
Paint plain my poor conceit and make it serve?
I owe that withered woman everything—
Life, fortune, you, remember! Take my part—
Help me to pay her! Stand upon your rights?
You, with my rose, my hands, my heart on you?
Your rights are mine—you have no rights but mine.

NORBERT

Remain here. How you know me!

CONSTANCE

Ah, but still——

[He breaks from her: she remains. Dance-music from within.]

SECOND PART

Enter the QUEEN

QUEEN

Constance!—She is here as he said. Speak! quick!
Is it so? is it true—or false? One word!

CONSTANCE

True.

QUEEN

Mercifullest Mother, thanks to thee!

CONSTANCE

Madam!

IN A BALCONY

QUEEN

I love you, Constance, from my soul.
Now say once more, with any words you will,
'Tis true—all true—as true as that I speak.

CONSTANCE

Why should you doubt it?

QUEEN

Ah, why doubt? why doubt?

Dear, make me see it. Do you see it so?
None see themselves—another sees them best.
You say “why doubt it?”—you see him and me.
It is because the Mother has such grace
That if we had but faith—wherein we fail—
Whate'er we yearn for would be granted us;
Howbeit we let our whims prescribe despair,
Our very fancies thwart and cramp our will,
And so accepting life, abjure ourselves!
Constance, I had abjured the hope of love
And of being loved, as truly as yon palm
The hope of seeing Egypt from that turf.

CONSTANCE

Heaven!

QUEEN

But it was so, Constance, it was so.
Men say—or do men say it? fancies say—
“Stop here, your life is set, you are grown old.
Too late—no love for you, too late for love—
Leave love to girls. Be queen—let Constance love!”
One takes the hint—half meets it like a child,
Ashamed at any feelings that oppose.
“Oh, love, true, never think of love again!
I am a queen—I rule, not love, indeed.”
So it goes on; so a face grows like this,
Hair like this hair, poor arms as lean as these,
Till,—**ay**, it does not end so, I thank God!

MEN AND WOMEN

CONSTANCE

I cannot understand—

QUEEN

The happier you !

Constance, I know not how it is with men.
For women, (I am a woman now like you)
There is no good of life but love—but love !
What else looks good, is some shade flung from
love—

Love gilds it, gives it worth. Be warned by me,
Never you cheat yourself one instant. Love,
Give love, ask only love, and leave the rest !
O Constance, how I love you !

CONSTANCE

I love you.

QUEEN

I do believe that all is come through you.
I took you to my heart to keep it warm
When the last chance of love seemed dead in me ;
I thought your fresh youth warmed my withered
heart.

Oh, I am very old now, am I not ?
Not so ! it is true and it shall be true !

CONSTANCE

Tell it me ! let me judge if true or false.

QUEEN

Ah, but I fear you—you will look at me
And say “she’s old, she’s grown unlovely quite
Who ne’er was beauteous ! men want beauty still.”
Well, so I feared—the curse ! so I felt sure.

CONSTANCE

Be calm. And now you feel not sure, you say ?

IN A BALCONY

QUEEN

Constance, he came, the coming was not strange—
Do not I stand and see men come and go?
I turned a half look from my pedestal
Where I grow marble—"one young man the more!
He will love some one,—that is nought to me—
What would he with my marble stateliness?"
Yet this seemed somewhat worse than heretofore;
The man more gracious, youthful, like a god,
And I still older, with less flesh to change—
We two those dear extremes that long to touch.
It seemed still harder when he first began
Absorbed to labour at the state-affairs
The old way for the old end, interest.
Oh, to live with a thousand beating hearts
Around you, swift eyes, serviceable hands,
Professing they've no care but for your cause,
Thought but to help you, love but for yourself,
And you the marble statue all the time
They praise and point at as preferred to life,
Yet leave for the first breathing woman's cheek,
First dancer's, gypsy's, or street baladine's!
Why, how I have ground my teeth to hear men's
speech
Stifled for fear it should alarm my ear,
Their gait subdued lest step should startle me,
Their eyes declined, such queendom to respect,
Their hands alert, such treasure to preserve,
While not a man of these broke rank and spoke,
Or wrote me a vulgar letter all of love,
Or caught my hand and pressed it like a hand.
There have been moments, if the sentinel
Lowering his halbert to salute the queen,
Had flung it brutally and clasped my knees,
I would have stooped and kissed him with my soul.

CONSTANCE

Who could have comprehended!

MEN AND WOMEN

QUEEN

Ay, who—who?

Why, no one, Constance, but this one who did.
Not they, not you, not I. Even now perhaps
It comes too late—would you but tell the truth.

CONSTANCE

I wait to tell it.

QUEEN

Well, you see, he came,
Outfaced the others, did a work this year
Exceeds in value all was ever done
You know—it is not I who say it—all
Say it. And so (a second pang and worse)
I grew aware not only of what he did,
But why so wondrously. Oh, never work
Like his was done for work's ignoble sake—
It must have finer aims to spur it on!
I felt, I saw he loved—loved somebody.
And Constance, my dear Constance, do you know,
I did believe this while 'twas you he loved.

CONSTANCE

Me, madam?

QUEEN

It did seem to me your face
Met him where'er he looked : and whom but you
Was such a man to love? it seemed to me
You saw he loved you, and approved the love,
And that you both were in intelligence.
You could not loiter in the garden, step
Into this balcony, but I straight was stung
And forced to understand. It seemed so true,
So right, so beautiful, so like you both
That all this work should have been done by him
Not for the vulgar hope of recompense,
But that at last—suppose some night like this—

IN A BALCONY

Borne on to claim his due reward of me
He might say, "Give her hand and pay me so."
And I (O Constance, you shall love me now)
I thought, surmounting all the bitterness,
—"And he shall have it. I will make her blest,
My flower of youth, my woman's self that was,
My happiest woman's self that might have been!
These two shall have their joy and leave me here."
Yes—yes—

CONSTANCE

Thanks!

QUEEN

And the word was on my lips
When he burst in upon me. I looked to hear
A mere calm statement of his just desire
In payment of his labour. When, O Heaven,
How can I tell you? cloud was on my eyes
And thunder in my ears at that first word
Which told 'twas love of me, of me, did all—
He loved me—from the first step to the last,
Loved me!

CONSTANCE

You did not hear . . . you thought he spoke
Of love? what if you should mistake?

QUEEN

No, no—

No mistake! Ha, there shall be no mistake!
He had not dared to hint the love he felt—
You were my reflex—how I understood!
He said you were the ribbon I had worn,
He kissed my hand, he looked into my eyes,
And love, love was the end of every phrase.
Love is begun—this much is come to pass,
The rest is easy. Constance, I am yours—
I will learn, I will place my life on you,
But teach me how to keep what I have won.

MEN AND WOMEN

Am I so old? this hair was early grey;
But joy ere now has brought hair brown again,
And joy will bring the cheek's red back, I feel.
I could sing once too; that was in my youth.
Still, when men paint me, they declare me . . . yes,
Beautiful—for the last French Painter did!
I know they flatter somewhat; you are frank—
I trust you. How I loved you from the first!
Some queens would hardly seek a cousin out
And set her by their side to take the eye:
I must have felt that good would come from you.
I am not generous—like him—like you!
But he is not your lover after all—
It was not you he looked at. Saw you him?
You have not been mistaking words or looks?
He said you were the reflex of myself—
And yet he is not such a paragon
To you, to younger women who may choose
Among a thousand Norberts. Speak the truth!
You know you never named his name to me—
You know, I cannot give him up—ah God,
Not up now, even to you!

CONSTANCE

Then calm yourself.

QUEEN

See, I am old—look here, you happy girl,
I will not play the fool, deceive myself;
'Tis all gone—put your cheek beside my cheek—
Ah, what a contrast does the moon behold!
But then I set my life upon one chance,
The last chance and the best—am I not left,
My soul, myself? All women love great men
If young or old—it is in all the tales—
Young beauties love old poets who can love—
Why should not he the poems in my soul,
The love, the passionate faith, the sacrifice,
The constancy? I throw them at his feet.
Who cares to see the fountain's very shape

IN A BALCONY

And whether it be a Triton's or a Nymph's
That pours the foam, makes rainbows all around?
You could not praise indeed the empty conch;
But I'll pour floods of love and hide myself.
How I will love him! cannot men love love?
Who was a queen and loved a poet once
Humpbacked, a dwarf? ah, women can do that!
Well, but men too! at least, they tell you so.
They love so many women in their youth,
And even in age they all love whom they please;
And yet the best of them confide to friends
That 'tis not beauty makes the lasting love—
They spend a day with such and tire the next;
They like soul,—well then, they like phantasy,
Novelty even. Let us confess the truth
Horrible though it be—that prejudice,
Prescription . . . Curses! they will love a queen.
They will—they do. And will not, does not—he?

CONSTANCE

How can he? You are wedded—'tis a name
We know, but still a bond. Your rank remains,
His rank remains. How can he, nobly souled
As you believe and I incline to think,
Aspire to be your favourite, shame and all?

QUEEN

Hear her! there, there now—could she love like me?
What did I say of smooth-checked youth and grace?
See all it does or could do! so, youth loves!
Oh, tell him, Constance, you could never do
What I will—you, it was not born in! I
Will drive these difficulties far and fast
As yonder mists curdling before the moon.
I'll use my light too, gloriously retrieve
My youth from its enforced calamity,
Dissolve that hateful marriage, and be his,
His own in the eyes alike of God and man.

MEN AND WOMEN

CONSTANCE

You will do—dare do—Pause on what you say!

QUEEN

Hear her! I thank you, Sweet, for that surprise.
You have the fair face: for the soul, see mine!
I have the strong soul: let me teach you, here.
I think I have borne enough and long enough,
And patiently enough, the world remarks,
To have my own way now, unblamed by all.
It does so happen, I rejoice for it,
This most unhopèd-for issue cuts the knot.
There's not a better way of settling claims
Than this; God sends the accident express;
And were it for my subjects' good, no more,
'Twere best thus ordered. I am thankful now,
Mute, passive, acquiescent. I receive,
And bless God simply, or should almost fear
To walk so smoothly to my ends at last.
Why, how I baffle obstacles, spurn fate!
How strong I am! could Norbert see me now!

CONSTANCE

Let me consider. It is all too strange.

QUEEN

You, Constance, learn of me; do you, like me.
You are young, beautiful: my own, best girl,
You will have many lovers, and love one—
Light hair, not hair like Norbert's, to suit yours,
And taller than he is, for you are tall.
Love him like me! give all away to him;
Think never of yourself; throw by your pride,
Hope, fear,—your own good as you saw it once,
And love him simply for his very self.

IN A BALCONY

Remember, I (and what am I to you?)
Would give up all for one, leave throne, lose life,
Do all but just unlove him: he loves me.

CONSTANCE

He shall.

QUEEN

You, step inside my inmost heart.
Give me your own heart—let us have one heart—
I'll come to you for counsel; "This he says,
This he does, what should this amount to, pray?
Beseech you, change it into current coin.
Is that worth kisses? shall I please him there?"
And then we'll speak in turn of you—what else?
Your love (according to your beauty's worth)
For you shall have some noble love, all gold—
Whom choose you? we will get him at your choice.
—Constance, I leave you. Just a minute since
I felt as I must die or be alone
Breathing my soul into an ear like yours.
Now, I would face the world with my new life,
With my new crown. I'll walk around the rooms,
And then come back and tell you how it feels.
How soon a smile of God can change the world!
How we are all made for happiness—how work
Grows play, adversity a winning fight!
True, I have lost so many years. What then?
Many remain—God has been very good.
You, stay here. 'Tis as different from dreams,—
From the mind's cold calm estimate of bliss,
As these stone statues from the flesh and blood.
The comfort thou hast caused mankind, God's moon!

[She goes out. Dance-music from within.]

MEN AND WOMEN

PART THIRD

NORBERT *enters*

NORBERT

Well! we have but one minute and one word—

CONSTANCE

I am yours, Norbert!

NORBERT

Yes, mine.

CONSTANCE

Not till now!
You were mine. Now I give myself to you.

NORBERT

Constance!

CONSTANCE

Your own! I know the thriftier way
Of giving—haply, 'tis the wiser way.
Meaning to give a treasure, I might dole
Coin after coin out (each, as that were all,
With a new largess still at each despair)
And force you keep in sight the deed, reserve
Exhaustless till the end my part and yours,
My giving and your taking, both our joys
Dying together. Is it the wiser way?
I choose the simpler; I give all at once.
Know what you have to trust to, trade upon.
Use it, abuse it,—anything but say
Hereafter, “Had I known she loved me so,
And what my means, I might have thriven with it.”
This is your means. I give you all myself.

IN A BALCONY

NORBERT

I take you and thank God.

CONSTANCE

Look on through years!

We cannot kiss a second day like this,
Else were this earth, no earth.

NORBERT

With this day's heat

We shall go on through years of cold.

CONSTANCE

So best.

I try to see those years—I think I see.

You walk quick and new warmth comes; you look
back

And lay all to the first glow—not sit down

For ever brooding on a day like this

While seeing the embers whiten and love die.

Yes, love lives best in its effect; and mine,

Full in its own life, yearns to live in yours.

NORBERT

Just so. I take and know you all at once.

Your soul is disengaged so easily,

Your face is there, I know you; give me time,

Let me be proud and think you shall know me.

My soul is slower: in a life I roll

The minute out in which you condense yours—

The whole slow circle round you I must move,

To be just you. I look to a long life

To decompose this minute, prove its worth.

'Tis the sparks' long succession one by one

Shall show you in the end what fire was crammed

In that mere stone you struck: you could not know,

If it lay ever unproved in your sight,

As now my heart lies? your own warmth would hide

Its coldness, were it cold.

MEN AND WOMEN

CONSTANCE

But how prove, how?

NORBERT

Prove in my life, you ask?

CONSTANCE

Quick, Norbert—how?

NORBERT

That's easy told. I count life just a stuff
To try the soul's strength on, educe the man.
Who keeps one end in view makes all things serve.
As with the body—he who hurls a lance
Or heaps up stone on stone, shows strength alike,
So I will seize and use all means to prove
And show this soul of mine you crown as yours,
And justify us both.

CONSTANCE

Could you write books,
Paint pictures! one sits down in poverty
And writes or paints, with pity for the rich.

NORBERT

And loves one's painting and one's writing too,
And not one's mistress! All is best, believe,
And we best as no other than we are.
We live, and they experiment on life
Those poets, painters, all who stand aloof
To overlook the farther. Let us be
The thing they look at! I might take that face
And write of it and paint it—to what end?
For whom? what pale dictatress in the air
Feeds, smiling sadly, her fine ghost-like form
With earth's real blood and breath, the beauteous
life
She makes despised for ever? You are mine,
Made for me, not for others in the world,

IN A BALCONY

Nor yet for that which I should call my art,
That cold calm power to see how fair you look.
I come to you—I leave you not, to write
Or paint. You are, I am. Let Rubens there
Paint us.

CONSTANCE

So best!

NORBERT

I understand your soul.

You live, and rightly sympathise with life,
With action, power, success: this way is straight.
And days were short beside, to let me change
The craft my childhood learnt; my craft shall serve.
Men set me here to subjugate, enclose,
Manure their barren lives and force the fruit
First for themselves, and afterward for me
In the due tithe; the task of some one man,
By ways of work appointed by themselves.
I am not bid create, they see no star
Transfiguring my brow to warrant that—
But bind in one and carry out their wills.
So I began: to-night sees how I end.
What if it see, too, my first outbreak here
Amid the warmth, surprise and sympathy,
The instincts of the heart that teach the head?
What if the people have discerned in me
The dawn of the next nature, the new man
Whose will they venture in the place of theirs,
And whom they trust to find them out new ways
To the new heights which yet he only sees?
I felt it when you kissed me. See this Queen,
This people—in our phrase, this mass of men—
See how the mass lies passive to my hand
And how my hand is plastic, and you by
To make the muscles iron! Oh, an end
Shall crown this issue as this crowns the first.
My will be on this people! then, the strain,
The grappling of the potter with his clay,

MEN AND WOMEN

The long uncertain struggle,—the success
In that uprising of the spirit-work,
The vase shaped to the curl of the god's lip,
While rounded fair for lower men to see
The Graces in a dance they recognise
With turbulent applause and laughs of heart!
So triumph ever shall renew itself;
Ever to end in efforts higher yet,
Ever begun——

CONSTANCE

I ever helping?

NORBERT

Thus!

[As he embraces her, enter the QUEEN.]

CONSTANCE

Hist, madam—so I have performed my part.
You see your gratitude's true decency,
Norbert? a little slow in seeing it!
Begun to end the sooner. What's a kiss?

NORBERT

Constance!

CONSTANCE

Why, must I teach it you again?
You want a witness to your dullness, sir?
What was I saying these ten minutes long?
Then I repeat—when some young handsome man
Like you has acted out a part like yours,
Is pleased to fall in love with one beyond,
So very far beyond him, as he says—
So hopelessly in love, that but to speak
Would prove him mad, he thinks judiciously,
And makes some insignificant good soul
Like me, his friend, adviser, confidant
And very stalking-horse to cover him

IN A BALCONY

In following after what he dares not face—
When his end's gained—(sir, do you understand?)
When she, he dares not face, has loved him first,
—May I not say so, madam?—tops his hope,
And overpasses so his wildest dream,
With glad consent of all, and most of her
The confidant who brought the same about—
Why, in the moment when such joy explodes,
I do say that the merest gentleman
Will not start rudely from the stalking-horse,
Dismiss it with a "There, enough of you!"
Forget it, show his back unmannerly;
But like a liberal heart will rather turn
And say, "A tingling time of hope was ours—
Betwixt the fears and falterings—we two lived
A chanceful time in waiting for the prize.
The confidant, the Constance, served not ill;
And though I shall forget her in due time,
Her use being answered now, as reason bids,
Nay as herself bids from her heart of hearts,
Still, she has rights, the first thanks go to her,
The first good praise goes to the prosperous tool,
And the first—which is the last—thankful kiss."

NORBERT

—Constance? it is a dream—ah see you smile!

CONSTANCE

So, now his part being properly performed,
Madam, I turn to you and finish mine
As duly—I do justice in my turn.
Yes, madam, he has loved you—long and well—
He could not hope to tell you so—'twas I
Who served to prove your soul accessible.
I led his thoughts on, drew them to their place,
When oft they had wandered out into despair,
And kept love constant toward its natural aim.
Enough—my part is played; you stoop half-way
And meet us royally and spare our fears—
'Tis like yourself—he thanks you, so do I.

MEN AND WOMEN

Take him—with my full heart! my work is praised
By what comes of it. Be you happy, both!
Yourself—the only one on earth who can—
Do all for him, much more than a mere heart
Which though warm is not useful in its warmth
As the silk vesture of a queen! fold that
Around him gently, tenderly. For him—
For him,—he knows his own part.

NORBERT

Have you done?

I take the jest at last. Should I speak now?
Was yours the wager, Constance, foolish child,
Or did you but accept it? Well—at least,
You lose by it.

CONSTANCE

Now madam, 'tis your turn.

Restrain him still from speech a little more
And make him happier and more confident!
Pity him, madam, he is timid yet.
Mark, Norbert! do not shrink now! Here I yield
My whole right in you to the Queen, observe!
With her go put in practice the great schemes
You deem with, follow the career else closed—
Be all you cannot be except by her!
Behold her.—Madam, say for pity's sake
Anything—frankly say you love him. Else
He'll not believe it: there's more earnest in
His fear than you conceive—I know the man.

NORBERT

I know the woman somewhat, and confess
I thought she had jested better—she begins
To overcharge her part. I gravely wait
Your pleasure, madam: where is my reward?

QUEEN

Norbert, this wild girl (whom I recognise
Scarce more than you do, in her fancy-fit,

IN A BALCONY

Eccentric speech and variable mirth,
Not very wise perhaps and somewhat bold
Yet suitable, the whole night's work being strange)
—May still be right: I may do well to speak
And make authentic what appears a dream
To even myself. For, what she says, is true—
Yes, Norbert—what you spoke but now of love,
Devotion, stirred no novel sense in me,
But justified a warmth felt long before.
Yes, from the first—I loved you, I shall say,—
Strange! but I do grow stronger, now 'tis said,
Your courage helps mine: you did well to speak
To-night, the night that crowns your twelvemonths'
toil—

But still I had not waited to discern
Your heart so long, believe me! From the first
The source of so much zeal was almost plain,
In absence even of your own words just now
Which opened out the truth. 'Tis very strange,
But takes a happy ending—in your love
Which mine meets: be it so—as you choose me,
So I choose you.

NORBERT

And worthily you choose!

I will not be unworthy your esteem,
No, madam. I do love you; I will meet
Your nature, now I know it; this was well,
I see,—you dare and you are justified:
But none had ventured such experiment,
Less versed than you in nobleness of heart,
Less confident of finding it in me.
I like that thus you test me ere you grant
The dearest, richest, beauteousest and best
Of women to my arms! 'tis like yourself!
So—back again into my part's set words—
Devotion to the uttermost is yours,
But no, you cannot, madam, even you,
Create in me the love our Constance does.
Or—something truer to the tragic phrase—

MEN AND WOMEN

Not yon magnolia-bell superb with scent
Invites a certain insect—that's myself—
But the small eye-flower nearer to the ground:
I take this lady!

CONSTANCE

Stay—not hers, the trap—
Stay, Norbert—that mistake were worst of all.
(He is too cunning, madam !) it was I,
I, Norbert, who . . .

NORBERT

You, was it, Constance? Then,
But for the grace of this divinest hour
Which gives me you, I should not pardon here.
I am the Queen's: she only knows my brain—
She may experiment therefore on my heart
And I instruct her too by the result ;
But you, sweet, you who know me, who so long
Have told my heart-beats over, held my life
In those white hands of yours,—it is not well!

CONSTANCE

Tush! I have said it, did I not say it all?
The life, for her—the heart-beats, for her sake!

NORBERT

Enough! my cheek grows red, I think. Your test!
There's not the meanest woman in the world,
Not she I least could love in all the world,
Whom, did she love me, did love prove itself,
I dared insult as you insult me now.
Constance, I could say, if it must be said,
"Take back the soul you offer—I keep mine"
But—"Take the soul still quivering on your hand,
The soul so offered, which I cannot use,
And, please you, give it to some friend of mine,
For—what's the trifle he requites me with?"
I, tempt a woman, to amuse a man,
That two may mock her heart if it succumb?

IN A BALCONY

No! fearing God and standing 'neath his heaven,
I would not dare insult a woman so,
Were she the meanest woman in the world,
And he, I cared to please, ten emperors!

CONSTANCE

Norbert!

NORBERT

I love once as I live but once.
What case is this to think or talk about?
I love you. Would it mend the case at all
Should such a step as this kill love in me?
Your part were done: account to God for it.
But mine—could murdered love get up again,
And kneel to whom you pleased to designate
And make you mirth? It is too horrible.
You did not know this, Constance? now you know
That body and soul have each one life, but one:
And here's my love, here, living, at your feet.

CONSTANCE

See the Queen! Norbert—this one more last word—
If thus you have taken jest for earnest—thus
Loved me in earnest . . .

NORBERT

Ah, no jest holds here!

Where is the laughter in which jests break up?
And what this horror that grows palpable?
Madam—why grasp you thus the balcony?
Have I done ill? Have I not spoken the truth?
How could I other? Was it not your test,
To try me, and what my love for Constance meant?
Madam, your royal soul itself approves,
The first, that I should choose thus! so one takes
A beggar—asks him what would buy his child,
And then approves the expected laugh of scorn
Returned as something noble from the rags.
Speak, Constance, I'm the beggar! Ha, what's
this?

MEN AND WOMEN

You two glare each at each like panthers now.
Constance—the world fades; only you stand there!
You did not in to-night's wild whirl of things
Sell me—your soul of souls for any price?
No—no—'tis easy to believe in you.
Was it your love's mad trial to o'ertop
Mine by this vain self-sacrifice? well, still—
Though I should curse, I love you. I am love
And cannot change! love's self is at your feet.
[QUEEN *goes out.*

CONSTANCE

Feel my heart; let it die against your own.

NORBERT

Against my own! explain not; let this be.
This is life's height.

CONSTANCE

Yours! Yours! Yours!

NORBERT

You and I—
Why care by what meanders we are here
In the centre of the labyrinth? men have died
Trying to find this place out, which we have found.

CONSTANCE

Found, found!

NORBERT

Sweet, never fear what she can do—
We are past harm now.

CONSTANCE

On the breast of God.
I thought of men—as if you were a man.
Tempting him with a crown!

SAUL

NORBERT

This must end here—

It is too perfect!

CONSTANCE

There's the music stopped.
What measured heavy tread? it is one blaze
About me and within me.

NORBERT

Oh, some death
Will run its sudden finger round this spark,
And sever us from the rest—

CONSTANCE

And so do well.

Now the doors open—

NORBERT

'Tis the guard comes.

CONSTANCE

Kiss!

SAUL

I.

SAID Abner, "At last thou art come! Ere I tell, ere
thou speak,
Kiss my cheek, wish me well!" Then I wished it, and
did kiss his cheek.
And he, "Since the King, O my friend, for thy
countenance sent,
Neither drunken nor eaten have we; nor until from
his tent

MEN AND WOMEN

Thou return with the joyful assurance the King liveth
yet,
Shall our lip with the honey be bright, with the
water be wet.
For out of the black mid-tent's silence, a space of
three days,
Not a sound hath escaped to thy servants, of prayer
or of praise,
To betoken that Saul and the Spirit have ended 'their
strife,
And that, faint in his triumph, the monarch sinks
back upon life.

II.

Yet now my heart leaps, O beloved ! God's child, with
his dew
On thy gracious gold hair, and those lilies still living
and blue
Just broken to twine round thy harp-strings, as if no
wild heat
Were now raging to torture the desert !”

III.

Then I, as was meet,
Knelt down to the God of my fathers, and rose on
my feet,
And ran o'er the sand burnt to powder. The tent
was unlooped ;
I pulled up the spear that obstructed, and under I
stooped ;
Hands and knees on the slippery grass-patch, all
withered and gone,
That extends to the second enclosure, I groped my
way on
Till I felt where the foldskirts fly open. Then once
more I prayed,
And opened the foldskirts and entered, and was not
afraid,
But spoke, “Here is David, thy servant !” And no
voice replied.

SAUL

At the first I saw nought but the blackness; but soon
I descried
A something more black than the blackness—the vast
the upright
Main prop which sustains the pavilion: and slow into
sight
Grew a figure against it, gigantic and blackest of
all;—
Then a sunbeam, that burst thro' the tent-roof,—
showed Saul.

IV.

He stood as erect as that tent-prop; both arms
stretched out wide
On the great cross-support in the centre, that goes to
each side:
He relaxed not a muscle, but hung there,—as, caught
in his pangs
And waiting his change the king-serpent all heavily
hangs,
Far away from his kind, in the pine, till deliverance
come
With the spring-time,—so agonized Saul, drear and
stark, blind and dumb.

V.

Then I tuned my harp,—took off the lilies we twine
round its chords
Lest they snap 'neath the stress of the noontide—
those sunbeams like swords!
And I first played the tune all our sheep know, as,
one after one,
So docile they come to the pen-door, till folding be
done.
They are white and untorn by the bushes, for lo,
they have fed
Where the long grasses stifle the water within the
stream's bed;
And now one after one seeks its lodging, as star
follows star

MEN AND WOMEN

Into eve and the blue far above us,—so blue and
so far!

VI.

—Then the tune, for which quails on the cornland
will each leave his mate
To fly after the player; then, what makes the crickets
elate,
Till for boldness they fight one another: and then,
what has weight
To set the quick jerboa a-musing outside his sand
house—
There are none such as he for a wonder, half bird
and half mouse!—
God made all the creatures and gave them our love
and our fear,
To give sign, we and they are his children, one
family here.

VII.

Then I played the help-tune of our reapers, their
wine-song, when hand
Grasps at hand, eye lights eye in good friendship, and
great hearts expand
And grow one in the sense of this world's life.—And
then, the last song—
When the dead man is praised on his journey—
“Bear, bear him along
With his few faults shut up like dead flowerets! are
balm-seeds not here
To console us? The land has none left, such as he on
the bier.
Oh, would we might keep thee, my brother!”—And
then, the glad chaunt
Of the marriage,—first go the young maidens, next,
she whom we vaunt
As the beauty, the pride of our dwelling.—And then,
the great march
Wherein man runs to man to assist him and buttress
an arch

SAUL

Nought can break; who shall harm them, our friends?
—Then, the chorus intoned
As the Levites go up to the altar in glory
enthroned . . .
But I stopped here—for here in the darkness, Saul
groaned.

VIII.

And I paused, held my breath in such silence, and
listened apart;
And the tent shook, for mighty Saul shuddered,—and
sparkles 'gan dart
From the jewels that woke in his turban at once
with a start—
All its lordly male-sapphires, and rubies courageous
at heart.
So the head—but the body still moved not, still hung
there erect.
And I bent once again to my playing, pursued it
unchecked,
As I sang,—

IX.

“Oh, our manhood's prime vigour!
no spirit feels waste,
Not a muscle is stopped in its playing, nor sinew
unbraced.
Oh, the wild joys of living! the leaping from rock up
to rock—
The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree,—the
cool silver shock
Of the plunge in a pool's living water,—the hunt of
the bear,
And the sultriness showing the lion is couched in
his lair.
And the meal—the rich dates—yellowed over with
gold dust divine,
And the locust's-flesh steeped in the pitcher; the full
draught of wine,
And the sleep in the dried river-channel where
bulrushes tell

MEN AND WOMEN

That the water was wont to go warbling so softly
and well.
How good is man's life, the mere living! how fit to
employ
All the heart and the soul and the senses, for ever
in joy!
Hast thou loved the white locks of thy father, whose
sword thou didst guard
When he trusted thee forth with the armies, for
glorious reward?
Didst thou see the thin hands of thy mother, held up
as men sung
The low song of the nearly-departed, and heard her
faint tongue
Joining in while it could to the witness, 'Let one
more attest,
I have lived, seen God's hand thro' a lifetime, and all
was for best . . .'
Then they sung thro' their tears in strong triumph,
not much,—but the rest.
And thy brothers, the help and the contest, the
working whence grew
Such result as from seething grape-bundles, the spirit
strained true!
And the friends of thy boyhood—that boyhood of
wonder and hope,
Present promise, and wealth of the future beyond the
eye's scope,—
Till lo, thou art grown to a monarch; a people is
thine;
And all gifts which the world offers singly, on one
head combine!
On one head, all the beauty and strength, love and
rage, like the throe
That, a-work in the rock, helps its labour, and lets
the gold go:
High ambition and deeds which surpass it, fame
crowning it,—all
Brought to blaze on the head of one creature—King
Saul!"

SAUL

x.

And lo, with that leap of my spirit, heart, hand, harp
and voice,
Each lifting Saul's name out of sorrow, each bidding
rejoice
Saul's fame in the light it was made for—as when,
dare I say,
The Lord's army in rapture of service, strains through
its array,
And upsoareth the cherubim-chariot—"Saul!" cried
I, and stopped,
And waited the thing that should follow. Then Saul,
who hung propt
By the tent's cross-support in the centre, was struck
by his name.
Have ye seen when Spring's arrowy summons goes
right to the aim,
And some mountain, the last to withstand her, that
held, (he alone,
While the vale laughed in freedom and flowers) on a
broad bust of stone
A year's snow bound about for a breastplate,—leaves
grasp of the sheet?
Fold on fold all at once it crowds thunderously down
to his feet,
And there fronts you, stark, black but alive yet, your
mountain of old,
With his rents, the successive bequeathings of ages
untold—
Yea, each harm got in fighting your battles, each
furrow and scar
Of his head thrust 'twixt you and the tempest—all
hail, there they are!
Now again to be softened with verdure, again hold
the nest
Of the dove, tempt the goat and its young to the
green on its crest
For their food in the ardours of summer! One long
shudder thrilled

MEN AND WOMEN

All the tent till the very air tingled, then sank and
was stilled,
At the King's self left standing before me, released
and aware.
What was gone, what remained? all to traverse
'twixt hope and despair—
Death was past, life not come—so he waited. Awhile
his right hand
Held the brow, helped the eyes left too vacant forth-
with to remand
To their place what new object should enter: 'twas
Saul as before.
I looked up and dared gaze at those eyes, nor was
hurt any more
Than by slow pallid sunsets in autumn, ye watch
from the shore
At their sad level gaze o'er the ocean—a sun's slow
decline
Over hills which, resolved in stern silence, o'erlap and
entwine
Base with base to knit strength more intense: so, arm
folded in arm
O'er the chest whose slow heavings subsided.

XI.

What spell, or what charm,
(For, awhile there was trouble within me) what next
should I urge
To sustain him where song had restored him?—Song
filled to the verge
His cup with the wine of this life, pressing all that
it yields
Of mere fruitage, the strength and the beauty!
Beyond, on what fields,
Glean a vintage more potent and perfect to brighten
the eye
And bring blood to the lip, and commend them the
cup they put by?
He saith, "It is good;" still he drinks not—he lets me
praise life,

SAUL

Gives assent, yet would die for his own part.

XII.

Then fancies grew rife
Which had come long ago on the pastures, when
 round me the sheep
Fed in silence—above, the one eagle wheeled slow as
 in sleep,
And I lay in my hollow, and mused on the world
 that might lie
'Neath his ken, though I saw but the strip 'twixt the
 hill and the sky:
And I laughed—"Since my days are ordained to be
 passed with my flocks,
Let me people at least with my fancies, the plains
 and the rocks,
Dream the life I am never to mix with, and image
 the show
Of mankind as they live in those fashions I hardly
 shall know!
Schemes of life, its best rules and right uses, the
 courage that gains,
And the prudence that keeps what men strive for."
 And now these old trains
Of vague thought came again; I grew surer; so once
 more the string
Of my harp made response to my spirit, as thus—

XIII.

 "Yea, my king,"
I began—"thou dost well in rejecting mere comforts
 that spring
From the mere mortal life held in common by man
 and by brute:
In our flesh grows the branch of this life, in our soul
 it bears fruit.
Thou hast marked the slow rise of the tree,—how its
 stem trembled first
Till it passed the kid's lip, the stag's antler; then
 safely outburst

MEN AND WOMEN

The fan-branches all round; and thou mindest when
these too, in turn
Broke a-bloom and the palm-tree seemed perfect; yet
more was to learn,
Ev'n the good that comes in with the palm-fruit.
Our dates shall we slight,
When their juice brings a cure for all sorrow? or
care for the plight
Of the palm's self whose slow growth produced them?
Not so! stem and branch
Shall decay, nor be known in their place, while the
palm-wine shall staunch
Every wound of man's spirit in winter. I pour thee
such wine.
Leave the flesh to the fate it was fit for: the spirit
be thine!
By the spirit, when age shall o'ercome thee, thou still
shalt enjoy
More indeed, than at first when unconscious, the life
of a boy.
Crush that life, and behold its wine running! each
deed thou hast done
Dies, revives, goes to work in the world; until e'en
as the sun
Looking down on the earth, though clouds spoil him,
though tempests efface,
Can find nothing his own deed produced not, must
every where trace
The results of his past summer-prime,—so, each ray
of thy will,
Every flash of thy passion and prowess, long over,
shall thrill
Thy whole people the countless, with ardour, till they
too give forth
A like cheer to their sons, who in turn, fill the south
and the north
With the radiance thy deed was the germ of. Carouse
in the past.
But the license of age has its limit; thou diest at
last.

SAUL

As the lion when age dims his eye-ball, the rose at
her height,
So with man—so his power and his beauty for ever
take flight.
No! again a long draught of my soul-wine! look forth
o'er the years—
Thou hast done now with eyes for the actual; begin
with the seer's!
Is Saul dead? in the depth of the vale make his
tomb—bid arise
A grey mountain of marble heaped four-square, till
built to the skies.
Let it mark where the great First King slumbers—
whose fame would ye know?
Up above see the rock's naked face, where the record
shall go
In great characters cut by the scribe,—Such was
Saul, so he did;
With the sages directing the work, by the populace
chid,—
For not half, they'll affirm, is comprised there!
Which fault to amend,
In the grove with his kind grows the cedar, whereon
they shall spend
(See, in tablets 'tis level before them) their praise,
and record
With the gold of the graver, Saul's story,—the
statesman's great word
Side by side with the poet's sweet comment. The
river's a-wave
With smooth paper-reeds grazing each other when
prophet winds rave:
So the pen gives unborn generations their due and
their part
In thy being! Then, first of the mighty, thank God
that thou art."

XIV.

And behold while I sang . . . But O Thou who didst
grant me that day,

MEN AND WOMEN

And before it not seldom hast granted, thy help to
essay
Carry on and complete an adventure,—my Shield and
my Sword
In that act where my soul was thy servant, thy word
was my word,—
Still be with me, who then at the summit of human
endeavour
And scaling the highest man's thought could, gazed
hopeless as ever
On the new stretch of Heaven above me—till, Mighty
to save,
Just one lift of thy hand cleared that distance—God's
throne from man's grave!
Let me tell out my tale to its ending—my voice to
my heart,
Which can scarce dare believe in what marvels that
night I took part,
As this morning I gather the fragments, alone with
my sheep,
And still fear lest the terrible glory evanish like
sleep!
For I wake in the grey dewy covert, while Hebron
upheaves
The dawn struggling with night on his shoulder, and
Kidron retrieves
Slow the damage of yesterday's sunshine.

XV.

I say then,—my song
While I sang thus, assuring the monarch, and ever
more strong
Made a proffer of good to console him—he slowly
resumed
His old motions and habitudes kingly. The right
hand replumed
His black locks to their wonted composure, adjusted
the swathes
Of his turban, and see—the huge sweat that his
countenance bathes,

SAUL

He wipes off with the robe; and he girds now his
loins as of yore,
And feels slow for the armlets of price, with the clasp
set before.
He is Saul, ye remember in glory,—ere error had
bent
The broad brow from the daily communion; and still,
though much spent
Be the life and the bearing that front you, the same,
God did choose,
To receive what a man may waste, desecrate, never
quite lose.
So sank he along by the tent-prop, till, stayed by
the pile
Of his armour and war-cloak and garments, he leaned
there awhile,
And so sat out my singing,—one arm round the tent-
prop, to raise
His bent head, and the other hung slack—till I
touched on the praise
I foresaw from all men in all times, to the man
patient there,
And thus ended, the harp falling forward. Then first
I was 'ware
That he sat, as I say, with my head just above his
vast knees
Which were thrust out on each side around me, like
oak-roots which please
To encircle a lamb when it slumbers. I looked up
to know
If the best I could do had brought solace: he spoke
not, but slow
Lifted up the hand slack at his side, till he laid it
with care
Soft and grave, but in mild settled will, on my brow:
thro' my hair
The large fingers were pushed, and he bent back my
head, with kind power—
All my face back, intent to peruse it, as men do a
flower.

MEN AND WOMEN

Thus held he me there with his great eyes that
scrutinised mine—
And oh, all my heart how it loved him! but where
was the sign?
I yearned—"Could I help thee, my father, inventing
a bliss,
I would add to that life of the past, both the future
and this.
I would give thee new life altogether, as good, ages
hence,
As this moment,—had love but the warrant, love's
heart to dispense!"

XVI.

Then the truth came upon me. No harp more—no
song more! out-broke—

XVII.

"I have gone the whole round of Creation: I saw and
I spoke!
I, a work of God's hand for that purpose, received in
my brain
And pronounced on the rest of his handwork—returned
him again
His creation's approval or censure: I spoke as I
saw.
I report, as a man may of God's work—all's love, yet
all's law!
Now I lay down the judgeship he lent me. Each
faculty tasked
To perceive him, has gained an abyss, where a dew-
drop was asked.
Have I knowledge? confounded it shrivels at wisdom
laid bare.
Have I forethought? how purblind, how blank, to the
Infinite care!
Do I task any faculty highest, to image success?
I but open my eyes,—and perfection, no more and no
less,

SAUL

In the kind I imagined, full-fronts me, and God is
seen God
In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul and
the clod.
And thus looking within and around me, I ever
renew
(With that stoop of the soul which in bending upraises
it too)
The submission of Man's nothing-perfect to God's All-
Complete,
As by each new obeisance in spirit, I climb to his
feet!
Yet with all this abounding experience, this Deity
known,
I shall dare to discover some province, some gift of
my own.
There's one faculty pleasant to exercise, hard to
hoodwink,
I am fain to keep still in abeyance, (I laugh as I
think)
Lest, insisting to claim and parade in it, wot ye, I
worst
E'en the Giver in one gift. Behold! I could love if I
durst!
But I sink the pretension as fearing a man may o'er-
take
God's own speed in the one way of love: I abstain, for
love's sake!
—What, my soul? see thus far and no farther? when
door great and small,
Nine-and-ninety flew ope at our touch, should the
hundredth appal?
In the least things, have faith, yet distrust in the
greatest of all?
Do I find love so full in my nature, God's ultimate
gift,
That I doubt his own love can compete with it? here,
the parts shift?
~~Here~~ the creature surpass the Creator, the end, what
Began?—

MEN AND WOMEN

Would I fain in my impotent yearning do all for
this man,
And dare doubt He alone shall not help him, who yet
alone can ?
Would it ever have entered my mind, the bare will,
much less power,
To bestow on this Saul what I sang of, the marvellous
dower
Of the life he was gifted and filled with? to make
such a soul,
Such a body, and then such an earth for insphering
the whole?
And doth it not enter my mind (as my warm tears
attest)
These good things being given, to go on, and give one
more, the best ?
Ay, to save and redeem and restore him, maintain at
the height
This perfection,—succeed with life's dayspring, death's
minute of night?
Interpose at the difficult minute, snatch Saul, the
mistake,
Saul, the failure, the ruin he seems now,—and bid
him awake
From the dream, the probation, the prelude, to find
himself set
Clear and safe in new light and new life,—a new
harmony yet
To be run, and continued, and ended—who knows?—
or endure !
The man taught enough by life's dream, of the rest
to make sure.
By the pain-throb, triumphantly winning intensified
bliss,
And the next world's reward and repose, by the
struggle in this.

XVIII.

"I believe it! 'tis Thou, God, that givest, 'tis I who
receive :

SAUL

In the first is the last, in thy will is my power to believe.

All's one gift: thou canst grant it moreover, as prompt to my prayer

As I breathe out this breath, as I open these arms to the air.

From thy will, stream the worlds, life and nature, thy dread Sabaoth:

I will?—the mere atoms despise me! and why am I loth

To look that, even that in the face too? why is it I dare

Think but lightly of such impuissance? what stops my despair?

This;—'tis not what man Does which exalts him, but what man Would do!

See the king—I would help him but cannot, the wishes fall through.

Could I wrestle to raise him from sorrow, grow poor to enrich,

To fill up his life, starve my own out, I would—knowing which,

I know that my service is perfect.—Oh, speak through me now!

Would I suffer for him that I love? So wilt Thou—so wilt Thou!

So shall crown thee the topmost, ineffablest, uttermost Crown—

And thy love fill infinitude wholly, nor leave up nor down

One spot for the creature to stand in! It is by no breath,

Turn of eye, wave of hand, that Salvation joins issue with death!

As thy Love is discovered almighty, almighty be proved

Thy power, that exists with and for it, of Being beloved!

He who did most, shall bear most; the strongest shall stand the most weak.

MEN AND WOMEN

'Tis the weakness in strength that I cry for! my flesh,
that I seek
In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it
shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee: a Man like
to me,
Thou shalt love and be loved by, for ever! a Hand
like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See
the Christ stand!"

XIX.

I know not too well how I found my way home in
the night.
There were witnesses, cohorts about me, to left and
to right,
Angels, powers, the unuttered, unseen, the alive—
the aware—
I repressed, I got through them as hardly, as
strugglingly there,
As a runner beset by the populace famished for
news—
Life or death. The whole earth was awakened, hell
loosed with her crews;
And the stars of night beat with emotion, and tingled
and shot
Out in fire the strong pain of pent knowledge: but I
fainted not.
For the Hand still impelled me at once and supported
—suppressed
All the tumult, and quenched it with quiet, and holy
behest,
Till the rapture was shut in itself, and the earth
sank to rest.
Anon at the dawn, all that trouble had withered from
earth—
Not so much, but I saw it die out in the day's tender
birth;
In the gathered intensity brought to the grey of the
hills;

“DE GUSTIBUS—”

In the shuddering forests' new awe; in the sudden
wind-thrills;
In the startled wild beasts that bore off, each with
eye sidling still
Tho' averted, in wonder and dread; and the birds
stiff and chill
That rose heavily, as I approached them, made stupid
with awe!
E'en the serpent that slid away silent,—he felt the
new Law.
The same stared in the white humid faces upturned
by the flowers;
The same worked in the heart of the cedar, and
moved the vine-bowers.
And the little brooks witnessing murmured, persistent
and low,
With their obstinate, all but hushed voices—E'en so!
it is so.

“DE GUSTIBUS—”

I.

YOUR ghost will walk, you lover of trees,
(If loves remain)
In an English lane,
By a cornfield-side a-flutter with poppies.
Hark, those two in the hazel coppice—
A boy and a girl, if the good fates please,
Making love, say,—
The happier they!
Draw yourself up from the light of the moon,
And let them pass, as they will too soon,
With the beanflowers' boon,
And the blackbird's tune,
And May, and June!

MEN AND WOMEN

II.

What I love best in all the world,
Is, a castle, precipice-encurled,
In a gash of the wind-grieved Apennine.
Or look for me, old fellow of mine,
(If I get my head from out the mouth
O' the grave, and loose my spirit's bands,
And come again to the land of lands)—
In a sea-side house to the farther south,
Where the baked cicalas die of drouth,
And one sharp tree ('tis a cypress) stands,
By the many hundred years red-rusted,
Rough iron-spiked, ripe fruit-o'ercrusted,
My sentinel to guard the sands
To the water's edge. For, what expands
Without the house, but the great opaque
Blue breadth of sea, and not a break?
While, in the house, for ever crumbles
Some fragment of the frescoed walls,
From blisters where a scorpion sprawls.
A girl bare-footed brings and tumbles
Down on the pavement, green-flesh melons,
And says there's news to-day—the king
Was shot at, touched in the liver-wing,
Goes with his Bourbon arm in a sling.
—She hopes they have not caught the felons.

Italy, my Italy !

Queen Mary's saying serves for me—

(When fortune's malice

Lost her, Calais.)

Open my heart and you will see

Graved inside of it, "Italy."

Such lovers old are I and she ;

So it always was, so it still shall be !

WOMEN AND ROSES

WOMEN AND ROSES

I.

I DREAM of a red-rose tree.
And which of its roses three
Is the dearest rose to me?

II.

Round and round, like a dance of snow
In a dazzling drift, as its guardians, go
Floating the women faded for ages,
Sculptured in stone, on the poet's pages.
Then follow the women fresh and gay,
Living and loving and loved to-day.
Last, in the rear, flee the multitude of maidens,
Beauties unborn. And all, to one cadence,
They circle their rose on my rose tree.

III.

Dear rose, thy term is reached,
Thy leaf hangs loose and bleached :
Bees pass it unimpeached.

IV.

Stay then, stoop, since I cannot climb,
You, great shapes of the antique time!
How shall I fix you, fire you, freeze you,
Break my heart at your feet to please you?
Oh! to possess, and be possessed!
Hearts that beat 'neath each pallid breast!
But once of love, the poesy, the passion,
Drink once and die!—In vain, the same fashion,
They circle their rose on my rose tree.

V.

Dear rose, thy joy's undimmed ;
Thy cup is ruby-rimmed,
Thy cup's heart nectar-brimmed.

MEN AND WOMEN

VI.

Deep as drops from a statue's plinth
The bee sucked in by the hyacinth,
So will I bury me while burning,
Quench like him at a plunge my yearning,
Eyes in your eyes, lips on your lips!
Fold me fast where the cincture slips,
Prison all my soul in eternities of pleasure!
Girdle me once! But no—in their old measure
They circle their rose on my rose tree.

VII.

Dear rose without a thorn,
Thy bud's the babe unborn:
First streak of a new morn.

VIII.

Wings, lend wings for the cold, the clear!
What's far conquers what is near.
Roses will bloom nor want beholders,
Sprung from the dust where our own flesh moulders.
What shall arrive with the cycle's change?
A novel grace and a beauty strange.
I will make an Eve, be the artist that began her,
Shaped her to his mind!—Alas! in like manner
They circle their rose on my rose tree.

PROTUS

AMONG these latter busts we count by scores,
Half-emperors and quarter-emperors,
Each with his bay-leaf fillet, loosed-thonged vest,
Loric and low-browed Gorgon on the breast
One loves a baby face, with violets there,
Violets instead of laurel in the hair,
As those were all the little locks could bear.

Now read here. "Protus ends a period

PROTUS

Of empery beginning with a god :
Born in the porphyry chamber at Byzant ;
Queens by his cradle, proud and ministrant.
And if he quickened breath there, 'twould like fire
Pantingly through the dim vast realm transpire.
A fame that he was missing, spread afar—
The world, from its four corners, rose in war,
Till he was borne out on a balcony
To pacify the world when it should see.
The captains ranged before him, one, his hand
Made baby points at, gained the chief command.
And day by day more beautiful he grew
In shape, all said, in feature and in hue,
While young Greek sculptors gazing on the child
Were, so, with old Greek sculpture, reconciled.
Already sages laboured to condense
In easy tomes a life's experience :
And artists took grave counsel to impart
In one breath and one hand-sweep, all their art—
To make his graces prompt as blossoming
Of plentifully-watered palms in spring :
Since well beseems it, whoso mounts the throne,
For beauty, knowledge, strength, should stand
alone,
And mortals love the letters of his name."

—Stop ! have you turned two pages ? Still the same.
New reign, same date. The scribe goes on to say
How that same year, on such a month and day,
"John the Pannonian, groundedly believed
A blacksmith's bastard, whose hard hand reprieved
The Empire from its fate the year before,—
Came, had a mind to take the crown, and wore
The same for six years, (during which the Huns
Kept off their fingers from us) till his sons
Put something in his liquor"—and so forth.
Then a new reign. Stay—"Take at its just worth"
(Subjoins an annotator) "what I give
As hearsay. Some think John let Protus live
And slip away. 'Tis said, he reached man's age

MEN AND WOMEN

At some blind northern court; made first a page;
Then, tutor to the children—last, of use
About the hunting-stables. I deduce
He wrote the little tract ‘On worming dogs,’
Whereof the name in sundry catalogues
Is extant yet. A Protus of the Race
Is rumoured to have died a monk in Thrace,—
And if the same, he reached senility.”

Here’s John the Smith’s rough-hammered head.
Great eye,
Gross jaw and griped lips do what granite can
To give you the crown-grasper. What a man!

HOLY-CROSS DAY

ON WHICH THE JEWS WERE FORCED TO ATTEND AN
ANNUAL CHRISTIAN SERMON IN ROME.

Though what the Jews really said, on thus being driven to church,
was rather to this effect:

I.

FEE, faw, fum! bubble and squeak!
Blessedest Thursday’s the fat of the week.
Rumble and tumble, sleek and rough,
Stinking and savoury, smug and gruff,
Take the church-road, for the bell’s due chime
Gives us the summons—’tis sermon-time.

II.

Boh, here’s Barnabas! Job, that’s you?
Up stumps Solomon—bustling too?
Shame, man! greedy beyond your years
To handsel the bishop’s shaving-shears?
Fair play’s a jewel! leave friends in the lurch?
Stand on a line ere you start for the church.

HOLY-CROSS DAY

III.

Higgledy piggedy, packed we lie,
Rats in a hamper, swine in a sty,
Wasps in a bottle, frogs in a sieve,
Worms in a carcase, fleas in a sleeve.
Hist! square shoulders, settle your thumbs
And buzz for the bishop—here he comes.

IV.

Bow, wow, wow—a bone for the dog!
I liken his Grace to an acorned hog.
What, a boy at his side, with the bloom of a lass,
To help and handle my lord's hour-glass!
Didst ever behold so lithe a chine?
His cheek hath laps like a fresh-singed swine.

V.

Aaron's asleep—shove hip to haunch,
Or somebody deal him a dig in the paunch!
Look at the purse with the tassel and knob,
And the gown with the angel and thingumbob.
What's he at, quotha? reading his text!
Now you've his curtsey—and what comes next?

VI.

See to our converts—you doomed black dozen—
No stealing away—nor cog nor cozen!
You five that were thieves, deserve it fairly;
You seven that were beggars, will live less sparely
You took your turn and dipped in the hat,
Got fortune—and fortune gets you; mind that!

VII.

Give your first groan—compunction's at work;
And soft! from a Jew you mount to a Turk.
Lo, Micah,—the self-same beard on chin
He was four times already converted in!
Here's a knife, clip quick—it's a sign of grace—
Or he ruins us all with his hanging-face.

MEN AND WOMEN

VIII.

Whom now is the bishop a-leering at?
I know a point where his text falls pat.
I'll tell him to-morrow, a word just now
Went to my heart and made me vow
I meddle no more with the worst of trades—
Let somebody else pay his serenades.

IX.

Groan all together now, whee—hee—hee!
It's a-work, it's a-work, ah, woe is me!
It began, when a herd of us, picked and placed,
Were spurred through the Corso, stripped to the
waist;
Jew-brutes, with sweat and blood well spent
To usher in worthily Christian Lent.

X.

It grew, when the hangman entered our bounds,
Yelled, pricked us out to this church like hounds.
It got to a pitch, when the hand indeed
Which gutted my purse, would throttle my creed.
And it overflows, when, to even the odd,
Men I helped to their sins, help me to their God.

XI.

But now, while the scapegoats leave our flock,
And the rest sit silent and count the clock,
Since forced to muse the appointed time
On these precious facts and truths sublime,—
Let us fitly employ it, under our breath,
In saying Ben Ezra's Song of Death.

XII.

For Rabbi Ben Ezra, the night he died,
Called sons and sons' sons to his side,
And spoke, "This world has been harsh and strange,
Something is wrong, there needeth a change.
But what, or where? at the last, or first?
In one point only we sinned, at worst.

HOLY-CROSS DAY

XIII.

“The Lord will have mercy on Jacob yet,
And again in his border see Israel set.
When Judah beholds Jerusalem,
The stranger-seed shall be joined to them :
To Jacob’s House shall the Gentiles cleave.
So the prophet saith and his sons believe.

XIV.

“Ay, the children of the chosen race
Shall carry and bring them to their place :
In the land of the Lord shall lead the same,
Bondsmen and handmaids. Who shall blame,
When the slaves enslave, the oppressed ones o’er
The oppressor triumph for evermore ?

XV.

“God spoke, and gave us the word to keep :
Bade never fold the hands nor sleep
’Mid a faithless world,—at watch and ward,
Till the Christ at the end relieve our guard.
By his servent Moses the watch was set :
Though near upon cock-crow—we keep it yet.

XVI.

“Thou ! if thou wast He, who at mid-watch came,
By the starlight naming a dubious Name !
And if we were too heavy with sleep—too rash
With fear—O thou, if that martyr-gash
Fell on thee coming to take thine own,
And we gave the Cross, when we owed the Throne—

XVII.

“Thou art the Judge. We are bruised thus.
But, the judgment over, join sides with us !
Thine too is the cause ! and not more thine
Than ours, is the work of these dogs and swine,
Whose life laughs through and spits at their creed,
Who maintain thee in word, and defy thee in deed !

MEN AND WOMEN

XVIII.

“We withstood Christ then? be mindful how
At least we withstand Barabbas now!
Was our outrage sore? but the worst we spared,
To have called these—Christians,—had we dared!
Let defiance to them, pay mistrust of thee,
And Rome make amends for Calvary!

XIX.

“By the torture, prolonged from age to age,
By the infamy, Israel’s heritage,
By the Ghetto’s plague, by the garb’s disgrace,
By the badge of shame, by the felon’s place,
By the branding-tool, the bloody whip,
And the summons to Christian fellowship,

XX.

“We boast our proofs, that at least the Jew
Would wrest Christ’s name from the Devil’s crew.
Thy face took never so deep a shade
But we fought them in it, God our aid!
A trophy to bear, as we march, a band
South, east, and on to the Pleasant Land!’

THE GUARDIAN-ANGEL:

A PICTURE AT FANO

I.

DEAR and great Angel, wouldst thou only leave
That child, when thou hast done with him, for me!
Let me sit all the day here, that when eve
Shall find performed thy special ministry
And time come for departure, thou, suspending
Thy flight, mayst see another child for tending,
Another still, to quiet and retrieve.

THE GUARDIAN-ANGEL

II.

Then I shall feel thee step one step, no more,
From where thou standest now, to where I gaze,
And suddenly my head be covered o'er
With those wings, white above the child who prays
Now on that tomb—and I shall feel thee guarding
Me, out of all the world; for me, discarding
Yon heaven thy home, that waits and opes its door!

III.

I would not look up thither past thy head
Because the door opes, like that child, I know,
For I should have thy gracious face instead,
Thou bird of God! And wilt thou bend me low
Like him, and lay, like his, my hands together,
And lift them up to pray, and gently tether
Me, as thy lamb there, with thy garment's spread?

IV.

If this was ever granted, I would rest
My head beneath thine, while thy healing hands
Close-covered both my eyes beside thy breast,
Pressing the brain, which too much thought expands,
Back to its proper size again, and smoothing
Distortion down till every nerve had soothing,
And all lay quiet, happy and suppress.

V.

How soon all worldly wrong would be repaired!
I think how I should view the earth and skies
And sea, when once again my brow was bared
After thy healing, with such different eyes.
O, world, as God has made it! all is beauty:
And knowing this, is love, and love is duty.
What further may be sought for or declared?

VI.

Guercino drew this angel I saw teach
(Alfred, dear friend)—that little child to pray
Holding the little hands up, each to each

MEN AND WOMEN

Pressed gently,—with his own head turned away
Over the earth where so much lay before him
Of work to do, though heaven was opening o'er him,
And he was left at Fano by the beach.

VII.

We were at Fano, and three times we went
To sit and see him in his chapel there,
And drink his beauty to our soul's content
—My angel with me too: and since I care
For dear Guercino's fame, (to which in power
And glory comes this picture for a dower,
Fraught with a pathos so magnificent)

VIII.

And since he did not work so earnestly
At all times, and has else endured some wrong,—
I took one thought his picture struck from me,
And spread it out, translating it to song.
My love is here. Where are you, dear old friend?
How rolls the Wairoa at your world's far end?
This is Ancona, yonder is the sea.

CLEON

"As certain also of your own poets have said."—

CLEON the poet, (from the sprinkled isles,
Lily on lily, that o'erlace the sea,
And laugh their pride when the light wave lisps
"Greece")—
To Protos in his Tyranny: much health!

They give thy letter to me, even now:
I read and seem as if I heard thee speak.
The master of thy galley still unlades
Gift after gift; they block my court at last
And pile themselves along its portico

CLEON

Royal with sunset, like a thought of thee:
And one white she-slave from the group dispersed
Of black and white slaves, (like the chequer-work
Pavement, at once my nation's work and gift,
Now covered with this settle-down of doves)
One lyric woman, in her crocus vest
Woven of sea-wools, with her two white hands
Commends to me the strainer and the cup
Thy lip hath bettered ere it blesses mine.

Well-counselled, king, in thy munificence!
For so shall men remark, in such an act
Of love for him whose song gives life its joy,
Thy recognition of the use of life;
Nor call thy spirit barely adequate
To help on life in straight ways, broad enough
For vulgar souls, by ruling and the rest.
Thou, in the daily building of thy tower,
Whether in fierce and sudden spasms of toil,
Or through dim lulls of unapparent growth,
Or when the general work 'mid good acclaim
Climbed with the eye to cheer the architect,
Didst ne'er engage in work for mere work's sake—
Hadst ever in thy heart the luring hope
Of some eventual rest a-top of it,
Whence, all the tumult of the building hushed,
Thou first of men mightst look out to the east.
The vulgar saw thy tower; thou sawest the sun.
For this, I promise on thy festival
To pour libation, looking o'er the sea,
Making this slave narrate thy fortunes, speak
Thy great words, and describe thy royal face—
Wishing thee wholly where Zeus lives the most
Within the eventual element of calm.

Thy letter's first requirement meets me here.
It is as thou hast heard: in one short life
I, Cleon, have effected all those things
Thou wonderingly dost enumerate.
That epos on thy hundred plates of gold

MEN AND WOMEN

Is mine,—and also mine the little chant,
So sure to rise from every fishing-bark
When, lights at prow, the seamen haul their nets.
The image of the sun-god on the phare
Men turn from the sun's self to see, is mine;
The Pœcile, o'er-storied its whole length,
As thou didst hear, with painting, is mine too.
I know the true proportions of a man
And woman also, not observed before;
And I have written three books on the soul,
Proving absurd all written hitherto,
And putting us to ignorance again.
For music,—why, I have combined the moods,
Inventing one. In brief, all arts are mine;
Thus much the people know and recognise,
Throughout our seventeen islands. Marvel not.
We of these latter days, with greater mind
Than our forerunners, since more composite,
Look not so great (beside their simple way)
To a judge who only sees one way at once,
One mind-point, and no other at a time,—
Compares the small part of a man of us
With some whole man of the heroic age,
Great in his way,—not ours, nor meant for ours,
And ours is greater, had we skill to know.
Yet, what we call this life of men on earth,
This sequence of the soul's achievements here,
Being, as I find much reason to conceive,
Intended to be viewed eventually
As a great whole, not analysed to parts,
But each part having reference to all,—
How shall a certain part, pronounced complete,
Endure effacement by another part?
Was the thing done?—Then what's to do again?
See, in the chequered pavement opposite,
Suppose the artist made a perfect rhomb,
And next a lozenge, then a trapezoid—
He did not overlay them, superimpose
The new upon the old and blot it out,
But laid them on a level in his work,

Making at last a picture; there it lies.
 So, first the perfect separate forms were made,
 The portions of mankind—and after, so,
 Occurred the combination of the same.
 Or where had been a progress, or otherwise?
 Mankind, made up of all the single men,—
 In such a synthesis the labour ends.
 Now, mark me—those divine men of old time
 Have reached, thou sayest well, each at one point
 The outside verge that rounds our faculty;
 And where they reached, who can do more than
 reach?

It takes but little water just to touch
 At some one point the inside of a sphere,
 And, as we turn the sphere, touch all the rest
 In due succession: but the finer air
 Which not so palpably nor obviously,
 Though no less universally, can touch
 The whole circumference of that emptied sphere,
 Fills it more fully than the water did;
 Holds thrice the weight of water in itself
 Resolved into a subtler element.
 And yet the vulgar call the sphere first full
 Up to the visible height—and after, void;
 Not knowing air's more hidden properties.
 And thus our soul, misknown, cries out to Zeus
 To vindicate his purpose in its life—
 Why stay we on the earth unless to grow?
 Long since, I imaged, wrote the fiction out,
 That he or other God, descended here
 And, once for all, showed simultaneously
 What, in its nature, never can be shown
 Piecemeal or in succession;—showed, I say,
 The worth both absolute and relative
 Of all his children from the birth of time,
 His instruments for all appointed work.
 I now go on to image,—might we hear
 The judgment which should give the due to each,
 Show where the labour lay and where the ease,
 And prove Zeus' self, the latent, everywhere!

MEN AND WOMEN

This is a dream. But no dream, let us hope,
That years and days, the summers and the springs
Follow each other with unwaning powers—
The grapes which dye thy wine, are richer far
Through culture, than the wild wealth of the rock;
The suave plum than the savage-tasted drupe;
The pastured honey-bee drops choicer sweet;
The flowers turn double, and the leaves turn flowers;
That young and tender crescent-moon, thy slave,
Sleeping upon her robe as if on clouds,
Refines upon the women of my youth.
What, and the soul alone deteriorates?
I have not chanted verse like Homer's, no—
Nor swept string like Terpander, no—nor carved
And painted men like Phidias and his friend:
I am not great as they are, point by point:
But I have entered into sympathy
With these four, running these into one soul,
Who, separate, ignored each others' arts.
Say, is it nothing that I know them all?
The wild flower was the larger—I have dashed
Rose-blood upon its petals, pricked its cup's
Honey with wine, and driven its seed to fruit,
And show a better flower if not so large.
I stand, myself. Refer this to the gods
Whose gift alone it is! which, shall I dare
(All pride apart) upon the absurd pretext
That such a gift by chance lay in my hand,
Discourse of lightly or depreciate?
It might have fallen to another's hand—what then?
I pass too surely—let at least truth stay!

And next, of what thou followest on to ask.
This being with me as I declare, O king,
My works, in all these varicoloured kinds,
So done by me, accepted so by men—
Thou askest if (my soul thus in men's hearts)
I must not be accounted to attain
The very crown and proper end of life.
Inquiring thence how, now life closeth up,

CLEON

I face death with success in my right hand :
Whether I fear death less than dost thyself
The fortunate of men. "For" (writest thou)
"Thou leavest much behind, while I leave nought :
Thy life stays in the poems men shall sing,
The pictures men shall study ; while my life,
Complete and whole now in its power and joy,
Dies altogether with my brain and arm,
Is lost indeed ; since,—what survives myself ?
The brazen statue that o'erlooks my grave,
Set on the promontory which I named.
And that—some supple courtier of my heir
Shall use its robed and sceptred arm, perhaps,
To fix the rope to, which best drags it down.
I go, then : triumph thou, who dost not go !"

Nay, thou art worthy of hearing my whole mind.
Is this apparent, when thou turn'st to muse
Upon the scheme of earth and man in chief,
That admiration grows as knowledge grows ?
That imperfection means perfection hid,
Reserved in part, to grace the after-time ?
If, in the morning of philosophy,
Ere ought had been recorded, ought perceived,
Thou, with the light now in thee, could'st have
looked

On all earth's tenantry, from worm to bird,
Ere man had yet appeared upon the stage—
Thou wouldst have seen them perfect, and deduced
The perfectness of others yet unseen.
Conceding which,—had Zeus then questioned thee
"Wilt thou go on a step, improve on this,
Do more for visible creatures than is done ?"
Thou wouldst have answered, "Ay, by making each
Grow conscious in himself—by that alone.
All's perfect else : the shell sucks fast the rock,
The fish strikes through the sea, the snake both
swims
And slides ; the birds take flight, forth range the
beasts,

MEN AND WOMEN

Till life's mechanics can no further go—
And all this joy in natural life, is put,
Like fire from off Thy finger into each,
So exquisitely perfect is the same.
But 'tis pure fire—and they mere matter are;
It has them, not they it: and so I choose,
For man, Thy last premeditated work
(If I might add a glory to this scheme)
That a third thing should stand apart from both,
A quality arise within the soul,
Which, intro-active, made to supervise
And feel the force it has, may view itself,
And so be happy." Man might live at first
The animal life: but is there nothing more?
In due time, let him critically learn
How he lives; and, the more he gets to know
Of his own life's adaptabilities,
The more joy-giving will his life become.
The man who hath this quality, is best.

But thou, king, hadst more reasonably said:
"Let progress end at once,—man make no step
Beyond the natural man, the better beast,
Using his senses, not the sense of sense."
In man there's failure, only since he left
The lower and unconscious forms of life.
We called it an advance, the rendering plain
A spirit might grow conscious of that life,
And, by new lore so added to the old,
Take each step higher over the brute's head.
This grew the only life, the pleasure-house,
Watch-tower and treasure-fortress of the soul,
Which whole surrounding flats of natural life
Seemed only fit to yield subsistence to;
A tower that crowns a country. But alas!
The soul now climbs it just to perish there,
For thence we have discovered ('tis no dream—
We know this, which we had not else perceived)
That there's a world of capability
For joy, spread round about us, meant for us,

CLEON.

Inviting us; and still the soul craves all,
And still the flesh replies, "Take no jot more
Than ere you climbed the tower to look abroad!
Nay, so much less, as that fatigue has brought
Deduction to it." We struggle—fain to enlarge
Our bounded physical recipiency,
Increase our power, supply fresh oil to life,
Repair the waste of age and sickness. No,
It skills not: life's inadequate to joy,
As the soul sees joy, tempting life to take.
They praise a fountain in my garden here
Wherein a Naiad sends the water-spurt
Thin from her tube; she smiles to see it rise.
What if I told her, it is just a thread
From that great river which the hills shut up,
And mock her with my leave to take the same?
The artificer has given her one small tube
Past power to widen or exchange—what boots
To know she might spout oceans if she could?
She cannot lift beyond her first straight thread.
And so a man can use but a man's joy
While he sees God's. Is it, for Zeus to boast
"See, man, how happy I live, and despair—
That I may be still happier—for thy use!"
If this were so, we could not thank our Lord,
As hearts beat on to doing: 'tis not so—
Malice it is not. Is it carelessness?
Still, no. If care—where is the sign, I ask—
And get no answer: and agree in sum,
O king, with thy profound discouragement,
Who seest the wider but to sigh the more.
Most progress is most failure! thou sayest well.

The last point now:—thou dost except a case—
Holding joy not impossible to one
With artist-gifts—to such a man as I—
Who leave behind me living works indeed;
For, such a poem, such a painting lives.
What? dost thou verily trip upon a word,
Confound the accurate view of what joy is

MEN AND WOMEN

(Caught somewhat clearer by my eyes than thine)
With feeling joy? confound the knowing how
And showing how to live (my faculty)
With actually living?—Otherwise
Where is the artist's vantage o'er the king?
Because in my great epos I display
How divers men young, strong, fair, wise, can act—
Is this as though I acted? if I paint,
Carve the young Phœbus, am I therefore young?
Methinks I'm older that I bowed myself
The many years of pain that taught me art!
Indeed, to know is something, and to prove
How all this beauty might be enjoyed, is more:
But, knowing nought, to enjoy is something too.
Yon rower with the moulded muscles there
Lowering the sail, is nearer it than I.
I can write love-odes—thy fair slave's an ode.
I get to sing of love, when grown too grey
For being beloved: she turns to that young man
The muscles all a-ripple on his back.
I know the joy of kingship: well—thou art king!

“But,” sayest thou—(and I marvel, I repeat,
To find thee tripping on a mere word) “what
Thou writest, paintest, stays: that does not die:
Sappho survives, because we sing her songs,
And Æschylus, because we read his plays!”
Why, if they live still, let them come and take
Thy slave in my despite—drink from thy cup—
Speak in my place. Thou diest while I survive?
Say rather that my fate is deadlier still,—
In this, that every day my sense of joy
Grows more acute, my soul (intensified
In power and insight) more enlarged, more keen;
While every day my hairs fall more and more,
My hand shakes, and the heavy years increase—
The horror quickening still from year to year,
The consummation coming past escape
When I shall know most, and yet least enjoy—
When all my works wherein I prove my worth,

CLEON

Being present still to mock me in men's mouths,
Alive still, in the phrase of such as thou,
I, I, the feeling, thinking, acting man,
The man who loved his life so over much,
Shall sleep in my urn. It is so horrible,
I dare at times imagine to my need
Some future state revealed to us by Zeus,
Unlimited in capability
For joy, as this is in desire for joy,
To seek which, the joy-hunger forces us.
That, stung by straitness of our life, made strait
On purpose to make sweet the life at large—
Freed by the throbbing impulse we call death
We burst there as the worm into the fly,
Who, while a worm still, wants his wings. But, no!
Zeus has not yet revealed it; and, alas!
He must have done so—were it possible!

Live long and happy, and in that thought die,
Glad for what was. Farewell. And for the rest,
I cannot tell thy messenger aright
Where to deliver what he bears of thine
To one called Paulus—we have heard his fame
Indeed, if Christus be not one with him—
I know not, nor am troubled much to know.
Thou canst not think a mere barbarian Jew,
As Paulus proves to be, one circumcised,
Hath access to a secret shut from us?
Thou wrongest our philosophy, O king,
In stooping to inquire of such an one,
As if his answer could impose at all.
He writeth, doth he? well, and he may write.
Oh, the Jew findeth scholars! certain slaves
Who touched on this same isle, preached him and
Christ;
And (as I gathered from a bystander)
Their doctrines could be held by no sane man.

MEN AND WOMEN

THE TWINS

"Give" and "It-shall-be-given-unto-you."

I.

GRAND rough old Martin Luther
Bloomed fables—flowers on furze,
The better the uncouth:
Do roses stick like burrs?

II.

A beggar asked an alms
One day at an abbey-door,
Said Luther; but, seized with qualms,
The Abbot replied, "We're poor!"

III.

"Poor, who had plenty once,
"When gifts fell thick as rain:
"But they give us nought, for the nonce,
"And how should we give again?"

IV.

Then the beggar, "See your sins!
"Of old, unless I err,
"Ye had brothers for inmates, twins,
"Date and Dabitur."

V.

"While Date was in good case
"Dabitur flourished too;
"For Dabitur's lenten face,
"No wonder if Date rue."

VI.

"Would ye retrieve the one?
"Try and make plump the other!

POPULARITY

"When Date's penance is done,
"Dabitur helps his brother."

VII.

"Only, beware relapse!"
The Abbot hung his head.
This beggar might be, perhaps,
An angel, Luther said.

POPULARITY

I.

STAND still, true poet that you are,
I know you; let me try and draw you.
Some night you'll fail us. When afar
You rise, remember one man saw you,
Knew you, and named a star.

II.

My star, God's glow-worm! Why extend
That loving hand of His which leads you,
Yet locks you safe from end to end
Of this dark world, unless He needs you—
Just saves your light to spend?

III.

His clenched Hand shall uncloze at last
I know, and let out all the beauty.
My poet holds the future fast,
Accepts the coming ages' duty,
Their present for this past.

IV.

That day, the earth's feast-master's brow
Shall clear, to God the chalice raising;
"Others give best at first, but Thou
For ever set'st our table praising,—
Keep'st the good wine till now."

MEN AND WOMEN

V.

Meantime, I'll draw you as you stand,
With few or none to watch and wonder.
I'll say—a fisher (on the sand
By Tyre the Old) his ocean-plunder,
A netful, brought to land.

VI.

Who has not heard how Tyrian shells
Enclosed the blue, that dye of dyes
Whereof one drop worked miracles,
And coloured like Astarte's eyes
Raw silk the merchant sells?

VII.

And each bystander of them all
Could criticise, and quote tradition
How depths of blue sublimed some pall,
To get which, pricked a king's ambition;
Worth sceptre, crown and ball.

VIII.

Yet there's the dye,—in that rough mesh,
The sea has only just o'er-whispered!
Live whelks, the lip's-beard dripping fresh,
As if they still the water's lisp heard
Through foam the rock-weeds thresh.

IX.

Enough to furnish Solomon
Such hangings for his cedar-house,
That when gold-robed he took the throne
In that abyss of blue, the Spouse
Might swear his presence shone

X.

Most like the centre-spike of gold
Which burns deep in the blue-bell's womb,
What time, with ardours manifold,
The bee goes singing to her groom,
Drunken and overbold.

THE HERETIC'S TRAGEDY

XI.

Mere conchs! not fit for warp or woof!
Till art comes,—comes to pound and squeeze
And clarify,—refines to proof
The liquor filtered by degrees,
While the world stands aloof.

XII.

And there's the extract, flasked and fine,
And priced, and saleable at last!
And Hobbs, Nobbs, Stokes and Nokes combine
To paint the future from the past,
Put blue into their line.

XIII.

Hobbs hints blue,—straight he turtle eats.
Nobbs prints blue,—claret crowns his cup.
Nokes outdares Stokes in azure feats,—
Both gorge. Who fished the murex up?
What porridge had John Keats?

THE HERETIC'S TRAGEDY

A MIDDLE-AGE INTERLUDE.

I.

PREADMONISHETH THE ABBOT DEODAET.

THE Lord, we look to once for all,
Is the Lord we should look at, all at once:
He knows not to vary, saith St. Paul,
Nor the shadow of turning, for the nonce.
See him no other than as he is;
Give both the Infinites their due—
Infinite mercy, but, I wis,
As infinite a justice too.
[Organ: *plagal-cadence*.
As infinite a justice too.

MEN AND WOMEN

II.

ONE SINGETH.

John, Master of the Temple of God,
Falling to sin the Unknown Sin,
What he bought of Emperor Aldabrod,
He sold it to Sultan Saladin—
Till, caught by Pope Clement, a-buzzing there,
Hornet-prince of the mad wasps' hive,
And clipt of his wings in Paris square,
They bring him now to be burned alive.

*[And wanteth there grace of lute or clavicithern,
ye shall say to confirm him who singeth—*

We bring John now to be burned alive.

III.

In the midst is a goodly gallows built;
'Twixt fork and fork, a stake is stuck;
But first they set divers tumbrils a-tilt,
Make a trench all round with the city muck,
Inside they pile log upon log, good store;
Faggots not few, blocks great and small,
Reach a man's mid-thigh, no less, no more,—
For they mean he should roast in the sight of all.

CHORUS.

We mean he should roast in the sight of all.

IV.

Good sappy bavins that kindle forthwith;
Billets that blaze substantial and slow;
Pine-stump split deftly, dry as pith;
Larch-heart that chars to a chalk-white glow:
Then up they hoist me John in a chafe,
Sling him fast like a hog to scorch,
Spit in his face, then leap back safe,
Sing "Laudes" and bid clap-to the torch.

THE HERETIC'S TRAGEDY

CHORUS.

Laus Deo—who bids clap-to the torch.

V.

John of the Temple, whose fame so bragged,
Is burning alive in Paris square !
How can he curse, if his mouth is gagged ?
Or wriggle his neck, with a collar there ?
Or heave his chest, while a band goes round ?
Or threat with his fist, since his arms are spliced ?
Or kick with his feet, now his legs are bound ?
—Thinks John—I will call upon Jesus Christ.
[Here one crosseth himself.]

VI.

Jesus Christ—John had bought and sold,
Jesus Christ—John had eaten and drunk ;
To him, the Flesh meant silver and gold.
(Salvè reverentiâ.)
Now it was, “Saviour, bountiful lamb,
I have roasted thee Turks, though men roast me.
See thy servant, the plight wherein I am !
Art thou a Saviour ? Save thou me !”

CHORUS.

'Tis John the mocker cries, Save thou me !

VII.

Who maketh God's menace an idle word ?
—Saith, it no more means what it proclaims,
Than a damsel's threat to her wanton bird ?—
For she too prattles of ugly names.
—Saith, he knoweth but one thing,—what he knows ?
That God is good and the rest is breath ;
Why else is the same styled, Sharon's rose ?
Once a rose, ever a rose, he saith.

CHORUS.

O, John shall yet find a rose, he saith !

MEN AND WOMEN

VIII.

Alack, there be roses and roses, John!
Some, honied of taste like your leman's tongue.
Some, bitter—for why? (roast gaily on!)
Their tree struck root in devil's dung!
When Paul once reasoned of righteousness
And of temperance and of judgment to come,
Good Felix trembled, he could no less—
John, snickering, crook'd his wicked thumb.

CHORUS.

What cometh to John of the wicked thumb?

IX.

Ha ha, John plucks now at his rose
To rid himself of a sorrow at heart!
Lo,—petal on petal, fierce rays uncloset;
Anther on anther, sharp spikes outstart;
And with blood for dew, the bosom boils;
And a gust of sulphur is all its smell;
And lo, he is horribly in the toils
Of a coal-black giant flower of Hell!

CHORUS.

What maketh Heaven, that maketh Hell.

X.

So, as John called now, through the fire amain,
On the Name, he had cursed with, all his life—
To the Person, he bought and sold again—
For the Face, with his daily buffets rife—
Feature by feature It took its place!
And his voice like a mad dog's choking bark
At the steady Whole of the Judge's Face—
Died. Forth John's soul flared into the dark.

SUBJOINETH THE ABBOT DEODAET.

God help all poor souls lost in the dark!

TWO IN THE CAMPAGNA

TWO IN THE CAMPAGNA

I.

I WONDER do you feel to-day
As I have felt, since, hand in hand,
We sat down on the grass, to stray
In spirit better through the land,
This morn of Rome and May?

II.

For me, I touched a thought, I know,
Has tantalised me many times,
(Like turns of thread the spiders throw
Mocking across our path) for rhymes
To catch at and let go.

III.

Help me to hold it: first it left
The yellowing fennel, run to seed
There, branching from the brickwork's cleft,
Some old tomb's ruin: yonder weed
Took up the floating weft,

IV.

Where one small orange cup amassed
Five beetles,—blind and green they grope
Among the honey-meal,—and last
Everywhere on the grassy slope
I traced it. Hold it fast!

V.

The champaign with its endless fleece
Of feathery grasses everywhere!
Silence and passion, joy and peace,
An everlasting wash of air—
Rome's ghost since her decease.

MEN AND WOMEN

VI.

Such life there, through such lengths of hours,
Such miracles performed in play,
Such primal naked forms of flowers,
Such letting Nature have her way
While Heaven looks from its towers.

VII.

How say you? Let us, O my dove,
Let us be unashamed of soul,
As earth lies bare to heaven above.
How is it under our control
To love or not to love?

VIII.

I would that you were all to me,
You that are just so much, no more—
Nor yours, nor mine,—nor slave nor free!
Where does the fault lie? what the core
Of the wound, since wound must be?

IX.

I would I could adopt your will,
See with your eyes, and set my heart
Beating by yours, and drink my fill
At your soul's springs,—your part, my part
In life, for good and ill.

X.

No. I yearn upward—touch you close,
Then stand away. I kiss your cheek,
Catch your soul's warmth,—I pluck the rose
And love it more than tongue can speak—
Then the good minute goes.

XI.

Already how am I so far
Out of that minute? Must I go
Still like the thistle-ball, no bar,

A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL

Onward, whenever light winds blow,
Fixed by no friendly star?

XII.

Just when I seemed about to learn!
Where is the thread now? Off again!
The old trick! Only I discern—
Infinite passion and the pain
Of finite hearts that yearn.

A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL

LET us begin and carry up this corpse,
Singing together.
Leave we the common crofts, the vulgar thorpes,
Each in its tether
Sleeping safe on the bosom of the plain,
Cared-for till cock-crow.
Look out if yonder's not the day again
Rimming the rock-row!
That's the appropriate country—there, man's thought
Rarer, intenser,
Self-gathered for an outbreak, as it ought,
Chafes in the censer!
Leave we the unlettered plain its herd and crop:
Seek we sepulture
On a tall mountain, citied to the top,
Crowded with culture!
All the peaks soar, but one the rest excels;
Clouds overcome it;
No, yonder sparkle is the citadel's
Circling its summit!
Thither our path lies—wind we up the heights—
Wait ye the warning?
Our low life was the level's and the night's;
He's for the morning!
Step to a tune, square chests, erect the head,
'Ware the beholders!

MEN AND WOMEN

This is our master, famous, calm, and dead,
 Borne on our shoulders.
Sleep, crop and herd ! sleep, darkling thorpe and croft,
 Safe from the weather !
He, whom we convey to his grave aloft,
 Singing together,
He was a man born with thy face and throat,
 Lyric Apollo !
Long he lived nameless : how should spring take note
 Winter would follow ?
Till lo, the little touch, and youth was gone !
 Cramped and diminished,
Moaned he, " New measures, other feet anon !
 My dance is finished ?"
No, that's the world's way ! (keep the mountain-side,
 Make for the city.)
He knew the signal, and stepped on with pride
 Over men's pity ;
Left play for work, and grappled with the world
 Bent on escaping :
" What's in the scroll," quoth he, " thou keepest
 furled ?
 Shew me their shaping,
Theirs, who most studied man, the bard and sage,—
 Give !"—So he gowned him,
Straight got by heart that book to its last page :
 Learned, we found him !
Yea, but we found him bald too—eyes like lead,
 Accents uncertain :
" Time to taste life," another would have said,
 " Up with the curtain !"
This man said rather, " Actual life comes next ?
 Patience a moment !
Grant I have mastered learning's crabbed text,
 Still, there's the comment.
Let me know all. Prate not of most or least,
 Painful or easy :
Even to the crumbs I'd fain eat up the feast,
 Ay, nor feel queasy !"
Oh, such a life as he resolved to live,

A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL

When he had learned it,
When he had gathered all books had to give;
Sooner, he spurned it!
Image the whole, then execute the parts—
Fancy the fabric
Quite, ere you build, ere steel strike fire from quartz,
Ere mortar dab brick!

(Here's the town-gate reached: there's the market-
place

Gaping before us.)

Yea, this in him was the peculiar grace
(Hearten our chorus)

Still before living he'd learn how to live—
No end to learning.

Earn the means first-- God surely will contrive
Use for our earning.

Others mistrust and say—"But time escapes,—
Live now or never!"

He said, "What's Time? leave Now for dogs and
apes!

Man has For ever."

Back to his book then: deeper drooped his head;
Calculus racked him:

Leaden before, his eyes grew dross of lead;
Tussis attacked him.

"Now, Master, take a little rest!"—not he!
(Caution redoubled!

Step two a-breast, the way winds narrowly.)
Not a whit troubled,

Back to his studies, fresher than at first,
Fierce as a dragon

He, (soul-hydroptic with a sacred thirst)
Sucked at the flagon.

Oh, if we draw a circle premature,
Heedless of far gain,

Greedy for quick returns of profit, sure,
Bad is our bargain!

Was it not great? did not he throw on God,
(He loves the burthen)—

MEN AND WOMEN

God's task to make the heavenly period
Perfect the earthen?
Did not he magnify the mind, shew clear
Just what it all meant?
He would not discount life, as fools do here,
Paid by instalment!
He ventured neck or nothing—heaven's success
Found, or earth's failure:
“Wilt thou trust death or not?” he answered “Yes.
Hence with life's pale lure!”
That low man seeks a little thing to do,
Sees it and does it:
This high man, with a great thing to pursue,
Dies ere he knows it.
That low man goes on adding one to one,
His hundred's soon hit:
This high man, aiming at a million,
Misses an unit.
That, has the world here—should he need the next,
Let the world mind him!
This, throws himself on God, and unperplexed
Seeking shall find Him.
So, with the throttling hands of Death at strife,
Ground he at grammar;
Still, thro' the rattle, parts of speech were rife.
While he could stammer
He settled *Hoti's* business—let it be!—
Properly based *Oun*—
Gave us the doctrine of the enclitic *De*,
Dead from the waist down.
Well, here's the platform, here's the proper place.
Hail to your purlieus
All ye highfliers of the feathered race,
Swallows and curlews!
Here's the top-peak! the multitude below
Live, for they can there.
This man decided not to Live but Know—
Bury this man there?
Here—here's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds
form,

ONE WAY OF LOVE

Lightnings are loosened,
Stars come and go! let joy break with the storm—
Peace let the dew send!
Lofty designs must close in like effects:
Loftily lying,
Leave him—still loftier than the world suspects,
Living and dying.

ONE WAY OF LOVE

I.

ALL June I bound the rose in sheaves.
Now, rose by rose, I strip the leaves,
And strew them where Pauline may pass.
She will not turn aside? Alas!
Let them lie. Suppose they die?
The chance was they might take her eye.

II.

How many a month I strove to suit
These stubborn fingers to the lute!
To-day I venture all I know.
She will not hear my music? So!
Break the string—fold music's wing.
Suppose Pauline had bade me sing!

III.

My whole life long I learned to love.
This hour my utmost art I prove
And speak my passion.—Heaven or hell?
She will not give me heaven? 'Tis well!
Lose who may—I still can say,
Those who win heaven, blest are they.

MEN AND WOMEN

ANOTHER WAY OF LOVE

I.

JUNE was not over,
Though past the full,
And the best of her roses
Had yet to blow,
When a man I know
(But shall not discover,
Since ears are dull,
And time discloses)
Turned him and said with a man's true air,
Half sighing a smile in a yawn, as 'twere,—
"If I tire of your June, will she greatly care?"

II.

Well, Dear, in-doors with you!
True, serene deadness
Tries a man's temper.
What's in the blossom
June wears on her bosom?
Can it clear scores with you?
Sweetness and redness,
Eadem semper!
Go, let me care for it greatly or slightly!
If June mends her bowers now, your hand left
unsightly
By plucking their roses,—my June will do rightly.

III.

And after, for pastime,
If June be refulgent
With flowers in completeness,
All petals, no prickles,
Delicious as trickles
Of wine poured at mass-time,—
And choose One indulgent
To redness and sweetness:

“TRANSCENDENTALISM”

Or if, with experience of man and of spider,
She use my June-lightning, the strong insect-ridder,
To stop the fresh spinning,—why, June will consider.

“TRANSCENDENTALISM:”

A POEM IN TWELVE BOOKS

STOP playing, poet! may a brother speak?
’Tis you speak, that’s your error. Song’s our art:
Whereas you please to speak these naked thoughts
Instead of draping them in sights and sounds.
—True thoughts, good thoughts, thoughts fit to
treasure up!

But why such long prolusion and display,
Such turning and adjustment of the harp,
And taking it upon your breast at length,
Only to speak dry words across its strings?
Stark-naked thought is in request enough—
Speak prose and holloa it till Europe hears!
The six-foot Swiss tube, braced about with bark,
Which helps the hunter’s voice from Alp to Alp—
Exchange our harp for that,—who hinders you?

But here’s your fault; grown men want thought,
you think;
Thought’s what they mean by verse, and seek in verse:
Boys seek for images and melody,
Men must have reason—so you aim at men.
Quite otherwise! Objects throng our youth, ’tis true,
We see and hear and do not wonder much.
If you could tell us what they mean, indeed!
As Swedish Bœhme never cared for plants
Until it happened, a-walking in the fields,
He noticed all at once that plants could speak,
Nay, turned with loosened tongue to talk with him.
That day the daisy had an eye indeed—
Colloquised with the cowslip on such themes!

MEN AND WOMEN

We find them extant yet in Jacob's prose.
But by the time youth slips a stage or two
While reading prose in that tough book he wrote,
(Collating, and emendating the same
And settling on the sense most to our mind)
We shut the clasps and find life's summer past.
Then, who helps more, pray, to repair our loss—
Another Bœhme with a tougher book
And subtler meanings of what roses say,—
Or some stout Mage like him of Halberstadt,
John, who made things Bœhme wrote thoughts
about?

He with a "look you!" vents a brace of rhymes,
And in there breaks the sudden rose herself,
Over us, under, round us every side,
Nay, in and out the tables and the chairs
And musty volumes, Bœhme's book and all,—
Buries us with a glory, young once more,
Pouring heaven into this shut house of life.

So come, the harp back to your heart again!
You are a poem, though your poem's naught.
The best of all you did before, believe,
Was your own boy's-face o'er the finer chords
Bent, following the cherub at the top
That points to God with his paired half-moon wings.

MISCONCEPTIONS

I.

THIS is a spray the Bird clung to,
Making it blossom with pleasure,
Ere the high tree-top she sprung to,
Fit for her nest and her treasure.
Oh, what a hope beyond measure
Was the poor spray's, which the flying feet hung to,—
So to be singled out, built in, and sung to!

ONE WORD MORE

II.

This is a heart the Queen leant on,
Thrilled in a minute erratic,
Ere the true bosom she bent on,
Meet for love's regal dalmatic.
Oh, what a fancy ecstatic
Was the poor heart's, ere the wanderer went on—
Love to be saved for it, proffered to, spent on!

ONE WORD MORE

TO E. B. B.

I.

THERE they are, my fifty men and women
Naming me the fifty poems finished!
Take them, Love, the book and me together.
Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also.

II.

Rafael made a century of sonnets,
Made and wrote them in a certain volume
Dinted with the silver-pointed pencil
Else he only used to draw Madonnas:
These, the world might view—but One, the volume.
Who that one, you ask? Your heart instructs you.
Did she live and love it all her life-time?
Did she drop, his lady of the sonnets,
Die, and let it drop beside her pillow
Where it lay in place of Rafael's glory,
Rafael's cheek so duteous and so loving—
Cheek, the world was wont to hail a painter's,
Rafael's cheek, her love had turned a poet's?

III.

You and I would rather read that volume,
(Take to his beating bosom by it)

MEN AND WOMEN

Lean and list the bosom-beats of Rafael,
Would we not? than wonder at Madonnas—
Her, San Sisto names, and Her, Foligno,
Her, that visits Florence in a vision,
Her, that's left with lilies in the Louvre—
Seen by us and all the world in circle.

IV.

You and I will never read that volume.
Guido Reni, like his own eye's apple
Guarded long the treasure-book and loved it.
Guido Reni dying, all Bologna
Cried, and the world with it, "Ours—the treasure!"
Suddenly, as rare things will, it vanished.

V.

Dante once prepared to paint an angel:
Whom to please? You whisper "Beatrice."
While he mused and traced it and retraced it,
(Peradventure with a pen corroded
Still by drops of that hot ink he dipped for,
When, his left-hand i' the hair o' the wicked,
Back he held the brow and pricked its stigma,
Bit into the live man's flesh for parchment,
Loosed him, laughed to see the writing rankle,
Let the wretch go festering thro' Florence)—
Dante, who loved well because he hated,
Hated wickedness that hinders loving,
Dante standing, studying his angel,—
In there broke the folk of his Inferno.
Says he—"Certain people of importance"
(Such he gave his daily, dreadful line to)
Entered and would seize, forsooth, the poet.
Says the poet—"Then I stopped my painting."

VI.

You and I would rather see that angel,
Painted by the tenderness of Dante,
Would we not?—than read a fresh Inferno.

ONE WORD MORE

VII.

You and I will never see that picture.
While he mused on love and Beatrice,
While he softened o'er his outlined angel,
In they broke, those "people of importance:"
We and Bice bear the loss forever.

VIII.

What of Rafael's sonnets, Dante's picture?

IX.

This: no artist lives and loves that longs not
Once, and only once, and for One only,
(Ah, the prize!) to find his love a language
Fit and fair and simple and sufficient—
Using nature that's an art to others,
Not, this one time, art that's turned his nature.
Ay, of all the artists living, loving,
None but would forego his proper dowry,—
Does he paint? he fain would write a poem,—
Does he write? he fain would paint a picture,
Put to proof art alien to the artist's,
Once, and only once, and for One only,
So to be the man and leave the artist,
Save the man's joy, miss the artist's sorrow.

X.

Wherefore? Heaven's gift takes earth's abatement!
He who smites the rock and spreads the water,
Bidding drink and live a crowd beneath him,
Even he, the minute makes immortal,
Proves, perchance, his mortal in the minute,
Desecrates, belike, the deed in doing.
While he smites, how can he but remember,
So he smote before, in such a peril,
When they stood and mocked—"Shall smiting help
us?"
When they drank and sneered—"A stroke is easy!"

MEN AND WOMEN

When they wiped their mouths and went their
journey,
Throwing him for thanks—"But drought was pleasant."

Thus old memories mar the actual triumph;
Thus the doing savours of disrelish;
Thus achievement lacks a gracious somewhat;
O'er-importuned brows becloud the mandate,
Carelessness or consciousness, the gesture.
For he bears an ancient wrong about him,
Sees and knows again those phalanxed faces,
Hears, yet one time more, the 'customed prelude—
"How should'st thou, of all men, smite, and save us?"
Guesses what is like to prove the sequel—
"Egypt's flesh-pots—nay, the drought was better."

XI.

Oh, the crowd must have emphatic warrant!
Theirs, the Sinai-forehead's cloven brilliance,
Right-arm's rod-sweep, tongue's imperial fiat.
Never dares the man put off the prophet.

XII.

Did he love one face from out the thousands,
(Were she Jethro's daughter, white and wifely,
Were she but the Æthiopian bondslave,)
He would envy yon dumb patient camel,
Keeping a reserve of scanty water
Meant to save his own life in the desert;
Ready in the desert to deliver
(Kneeling down to let his breast be opened)
Hoard and life together for his mistress.

XIII.

I shall never, in the years remaining,
Paint you pictures, no, nor carve you statues,
Make you music that should all-express me;
So it seems: I stand on my attainment.
This of verse alone, one life allows me;
Verse and nothing else have I to give you.

ONE WORD MORE

Other heights in other lives, God willing—
All the gifts from all the heights, your own, Love!

XIV.

Yet a semblance of resource avails us—
Shade so finely touched, love's sense must seize it.
Take these lines, look lovingly and nearly,
Lines I write the first time and the last time.
He who works in fresco, steals a hair-brush.
Curbs the liberal hand, subservient proudly,
Cramps his spirit, crowds its all in little,
Makes a strange art of an art familiar,
Fills his lady's missal-marge with flowerets.
He who blows thro' bronze, may breathe thro'
 silver,
Fitly serenade a slumbrous princess.
He who writes, may write for once, as I do.

XV.

Love, you saw me gather men and women,
Live or dead or fashioned by my fancy,
Enter each and all, and use their service,
Speak from every mouth,—the speech, a poem.
Hardly shall I tell my joys and sorrows,
Hopes and fears, belief and disbelieving:
I am mine and yours—the rest be all men's,
Karshook, Cleon, Norbert and the fifty.
Let me speak this once in my true person,
Not as Lippo, Roland or Andrea,
Though the fruit of speech be just this sentence—
Pray you, look on these my men and women,
Take and keep my fifty poems finished;
Where my heart lies, let my brain lie also!
Poor the speech; be how I speak, for all things.

XVI.

Not but that you know me! Lo, the moon's self!
Here in London, yonder late in Florence,
Still we find her face, the thrice-transfigured,
Curving on a sky imbrued with colour,

MEN AND WOMEN

Drifted over Fiesole by twilight,
Came she, our new crescent of a hair's-breadth.
Full she flared it, lamping Samminiato,
Rounder 'twixt the cypresses and rounder,
Perfect till the nightingales applauded.
Now, a piece of her old self, impoverished,
Hard to greet, she traverses the houseroofs,
Hurries with unhandsome thrift of silver,
Goes dispiritedly,—glad to finish.

XVII.

What, there's nothing in the moon note-worthy?
Nay—for if that moon could love a mortal,
Use, to charm him (so to fit a fancy)
All her magic ('tis the old sweet mythos)
She would turn a new side to her mortal,
Side unseen of herdsman, huntsman, steersman—
Blank to Zoroaster on his terrace,
Blind to Galileo on his turret,
Dumb to Homer, dumb to Keats—him, even!
Think, the wonder of the moonstruck mortal—
When she turns round, comes again in heaven,
Opens out anew for worse or better?
Proves she like some portent of an ice-berg
Swimming full upon the ship it founders,
Hungry with huge teeth of splintered chrystals?
Proves she as the paved-work of a sapphire
Seen by Moses when he climbed the mountain?
Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu
Climbed and saw the very God, the Highest,
Stand upon the paved-work of a sapphire.
Like the bodied heaven in his clearness
Shone the stone, the sapphire of that paved-work,
When they ate and drank and saw God also!

XVIII.

What were seen? None knows, none ever shall
know.

Only this is sure—the sight were other,
Not the moon's same side, born late in Florence,

ONE WORD MORE

Dying now impoverished here in London.
God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures
Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her.

XIX.

This I say of me, but think of you, Love!
This to you—yourself my moon of poets!
Ah, but that's the world's side—there's the wonder—
Thus they see you, praise you, think they know you.
There, in turn I stand with them and praise you,
Out of my own self, I dare to phrase it.
But the best is when I glide from out them,
Cross a step or two of dubious twilight,
Come out on the other side, the novel
Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of,
Where I hush and bless myself with silence.

XX.

Oh, their Rafael of the dear Madonnas,
Oh, their Dante of the dread Inferno,
Wrote one song—and in my brain I sing it,
Drew one angel—borne, see, on my bosom!

THE END.

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- 1 **A BLOT IN THE 'SOUTCHEON**—A Tragedy, in three acts. No. V. of 'Bells and Pomegranates,' 1843. It was acted at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, February 11th, 1843, with Miss Helen Faucit (Lady Martin) as Mildred, Mrs. Stirling as Guendolen and Mr. Phelps as Thorold. Browning wrote the play in five days, at Macready's suggestion.
- The text used in the present issue, as in the case of the poems which follow to 'A Soul's Tragedy' inclusive, is that of the two volume edition of Browning's Poems, 1849, the advertisement of which (dated December, 1848) says 'The various Poems and Dramas have received the author's most careful revision'
- 8 *eyass*. A hawk trained from the nest, not caught and trained.
- 20 *losels*. Worthless vagabonds
- 47 **COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY**.—A Play, in five acts. No. VI. of 'Bells and Pomegranates,' 1844 (the dedication is dated March). It was acted at the Haymarket Theatre, April 25th, 1853, Miss Helen Faucit as Colombe
- 60 *marcasite*. An iron ore, crystallized pyrites
- 88 *chrysoprase*. A precious stone, a green chalcedony
- 108 *Barnabite*. The Barnabites are a congregation of regular canons of St. Paul, founded in 1530
- 109 **DRAMATIC ROMANCES AND LYRICS**.—'Dramatic Lyrics' formed No. III. of 'Bells and Pomegranates,' 1842, with the 'Advertisement' behind the title-page which is given in a foot note on page 111. No. VII. (price 2/-) of 'Bells and Pomegranates' appeared under the title of 'Dramatic Romances and Lyrics,' 1845, with the Dedication behind the title page given on page 110, save that 'sincere friend' was changed later into 'grateful and affectionate friend.' These two numbers, slightly re-arranged, were published in the two volume edition of 1849 as 'Dramatic Romances and Lyrics.' The following variations in nomenclature from the earlier to the later form may be noted:—'My Wife Gertrude' becomes 'Boot and Saddle;' 'Italy and France. I. Italy, II. France' become, respectively, 'My Last Duchess' and 'Count Gismond;' 'Camp and Cloister. I. Camp (*French*) II. Cloister (*Spanish*)' become, respectively, 'Incident of the French Camp' and 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister;' 'Queen-Worship I. Rudel and the Lady of Tripoli. II. Cristina' become, respectively, 'Rudel the Lady of Tripoli,' and 'Cristina;' 'Madhouse Cells I. and II.' are entitled, respectively, 'Johannes Agricola in Meditation' and 'Porphyria's Lover.'

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No. III. 'Bells' ends with 'The Pied Piper' and No. VII. begins with 'How they brought the good news, etc.

'Italy in England' and 'England in Italy' become, respectively, 'The Italian in England' and 'The Englishman in Italy'; the third stanza of 'Home-Thoughts, from Abroad' becomes 'Home-Thoughts, from the Sea'; 'The Tomb at St. Praxed's' becomes 'The Bishop orders, etc.'; 'France and Spain, I. The Laboratory and II. Spain—The Confessional' are less elaborately defined; 'Earth's Immortalities' have no sub-titles in the earlier issue; 'Night and Morning, I. Night (I. and II.) and II. Morning' become 'Meeting at Night' (I. and II.) and 'Parting at Morning.' 'Claret' and 'Tokay' (see page 178-9 'My heart . . . strutting') were not reprinted in the two volume edition of 1849; they are therefore here reproduced from 'Bells and Pomegranates' (where they appear between 'Night and Morning' and 'Saul') under the title of 'Nationality in Drinks,' the title given them later, in the last rearrangement of these poems, where the stanza 'Here's to Nelson's memory' (page 177) which represents 'Beer,' appears after those which speak of Claret and Tokay respectively.

At the risk of a charge of repetition it seemed desirable, since the present Edition professes to give Browning's Early Editions in their entirety, to give the first part of 'Saul' (pages 220-5) as it appeared in the two volume edition (previously in 'Bells and Pomegranates') as well as its later and completed form in 'Men and Women' (pages 561-79)

It is worthy of note that some of these poems appeared first in 'Hood's Magazine' to help in filling up that journal when Hood lay dying

- 119 *tercel*. A male peregrine falcon
- 120 *Incident of the French Camp*. Napoleon stormed Ratisbon (Regensburg in Bavaria) in 1809
- 121 *your flag-bird*. The Eagle was a Napoleonic symbol. Vans=wings
- 123 *a great text in Galatians*. ? Chapter III. v. 10
- 123 *a Manichee*. A follower of Mani (born at Ecbatana, in Media), the philosopher of dualism, or the belief in two primal beings, Light and Darkness (8rd century)
- 124 *cruce*. Crucible, or goblet
- 127 *sains*. Blesses
- 127 *Lido's . . . graves*. 'Ancient Jewish tombs are there, [On the long island Lido, over against Venice] moss-grown and half-covered with sand'; Berdoe's 'Browning Cyclopædia'
- 127 *the Giudecca*. A Venetian Canal
- 128 *loory*. A kind of parrot
- 129 *Schidone*. Bartolommeo Schidone (1560-1616), a Modenese painter
- 129 *Haste-thee-Luke*. Fa-presto, the nickname of Luca Giordano (1632-1706) a Neapolitan painter, who had acquired the art of working rapidly

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- 129 *Castelfranco*. Giorgione (G. Barbarelli), the Venetian painter, who was born about 1476, at Castelfranco. He died in 1511
- 131 *gadbee*. Gadfly
- 134 *Waring*. Mr. Alfred Domett (1811-1887) a Colonial statesman and friend of Browning's
- 135 *Monstr'-inform', etc.* Virgil's *Æneid*, III. 658
- 137 *Vishnu-land*. India, where Vishnu is one of the chief gods worshipped
- Avatar*. Incarnation
- Kremlin*. The sacred Russian citadel (Moscow)
- syenite*. A kind of granite, composed of hornblende, feldspar and quartz
- Dian's fane at Taurica*. The temple of Diana in the district now called the Crimea
- Scythian*. Scythia was, roughly, the country bordering the north and east coasts of the Black and Caspian Seas
- 138 *Caldara Polidore*. Polidoro Caldara da Caravaggio (1492-1543), Italian painter
- 139 *Rowley*. Thomas Chatterton, the Bristol boy-poet (1752-70), who fabricated 15th century poems by a suppositious Rowley
- 140 *lateen sail*. A triangular sail used in the Mediterranean and on the Lake of Geneva
- 141 *Rudel to the Lady of Tripoli*. Geoffroi de Rudel, a Provençal troubadour (c. 1154)
- 142 *Cristina*. Maria Christina of Naples (1806-1878), wife of Ferdinand VII., King of Spain, and, later, Regent of Spain herself
- 144 *Johannes Agricola*. Johann Schnitter. His creed is Antinomianism, or the belief that Christians need not keep the law of God, a perversion of 'justification by faith.' Agricola (1499-1566) was, in his early life, an assistant of Luther's, in the foundation of Protestantism
- 148 *The Metidja*. An Algerian plain. Abd-el-Kader was an Arab chief who opposed the conquest of his country by the French, 1831-47
- 149 *The Pied Piper*. This poem was written for William Macready (son of W. C. Macready, the actor) to illustrate. The legend is met with under many forms
- 158 *How they brought the Good News, etc.* There is no foundation in historical fact for this tale. 'I wrote it under the bulwark of a vessel . . . when I had been at sea long enough to appreciate even the fancy of a gallop on the back of a certain good horse "York," then in my stable at home.' (R.B. See *Academy*, April 2, 1881)
- 162 *travertine*. A kind of limestone very abundant near Tivoli
- 163 *Charles*. Carlo Alberto (1798-1849), King of Sardinia
- 163 *Metternich*. The Austrian statesman (1773-1859), who stood for 'conservatism' against 'anarchy'
- 164 *Tenebræ*. The office of matins and lauds for the following day, which is sung with ceremonies peculiar to Holy Week, on Good Friday and the two previous days. During the service the lights

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- are gradually extinguished until, at last, the church is in darkness, hence the name
- 167 *Piano di Sorrento*. The plain of Sorrento, in Naples
- 168 *frails*. Rush-baskets
- 169 *lasagne*. A food made of thin paste
- 170 *sorbs*. Service-trees, which, in appearance, are like the Rowan tree or mountain ash
- 171 *lentisks*. Trees which produce the resin called mastic
- 172 *Galli*. Three islands south of the Sorrento Peninsula
- 174 *stomp*. ? Stamp
- 174 *The Lost Leader*. The reference is primarily to Wordsworth; it may be taken, however, as aimed generally at any change from Radicalism to Conservatism, from youth to age, if the sneer about 'silver and . . . ribbon' is recognised as a poetical disguise
- 179 *St. Praxed's*. A church in Rome
- 180 *onion-stone*. White marble shaded with pale green, possibly mixed with serpentine
- lapis lazuli*. A rich blue stone, the basis of natural ultramarine
- Frascati*. A fashionable resort on the Alban hills, near Rome: higher, on the ridge, is the ancient Tusculum
- antique black*. Nero Antico, a deep black marble
- thyrsus*. The ivy-entwined staff used in feasts of Bacchus
- 181 *jasper*. A greenish, red-spotted marble
- Ulpian*. A Roman law-writer (170-228), whose Latin is compared with that of the purest writer of Latin prose, Tully (=Cicero)
- mortcloth*. Funeral pall
- Elucescebat*. He was distinguished
- 182 *visor*. A mask
- Term*. A pedestal widening to the top and there ending in a representation (bust only) of the god Terminus
- tripod*. A three-legged altar, associated with the worship of Apollo
- 184 *pont-levis*. Drawbridge
- 193 *merlin*. The smallest of the British falcons
- 194 *urox*. Aurochs, a wild bull
- buffle*. Buffalo, or European bison
- 197 *St. Hubert*. The patron-saint of huntsmen
- 198 *Venerers, Prickers, and Verderers*. Hunters, lighthorsemen and officers of the royal forests
- 198 *wind a mort*. Sound the death-note
- jennet*. A small Spanish horse
- sealed her eyes*. In falconry to seal the eyes of a hawk was to close them with thread passed through the eyelids, to tame them
- 200 *a fifty-part canon*. "Mr. Browning explained that 'a canon, in music, is a piece wherein the subject is repeated in various keys, and, being strictly obeyed in the repetition, becomes the "canon"—the imperative law to what follows. Fifty of such parts would be indeed a notable peal; to manage three is enough of an achievement for a good musician.'" (Berdoe)

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- 203 *helicat.* A hag
 203 *hernshaw.* A young heron
fernshaw. Fernthicket
imps the wing. Inserts new feathers in broken wings
 204 *tomans.* Persian gold coins
 205 *gor-crow.* Carrion crow
 213 *ceruse.* A cosmetic
 214 *merion.* A hat-shaped helmet, lacking a vizor
hauberk. A coat of mail
 215 *Orson the wood-knight.* The bear-suckled boy in 'Valentine and Orson' the old romance
 220 *Abner.* Captain of Saul's host (1 Sam. xxvi. 5)
 222 *jerboa.* A jumping hare-like rodent
 223 *male-sapphires.* Dark-hued or indigo sapphires
 227 *Peter Ronsard.* 'Prince of Poets' (1524-1585)
 228 *Scarab.* Beetle
Clement Marot. French poet (? 1496-1544)
 232 *theorbo.* A seventeenth-century musical instrument, resembling a lute
 233 **LURIA; and A SOUL'S TRAGEDY** constituted No. VIII. and last of 'Bells and Pomegranates,' 1846. The dedication was dated March 29, 1846. Behind the half-title to *A Soul's Tragedy* appeared the following words, which were not reprinted later:—
 'Here ends my first series of "Bells and Pomegranates:" and I take the opportunity of explaining, in reply to enquiries, that I only meant by that title to indicate an endeavour towards something like an alternation, or mixture, of music with discoursing, sound with sense, poetry with thought; which looks too ambitious, thus expressed, so the symbol was preferred. It is little to the purpose, that such is actually one of the most familiar of the many Rabbinical (and Patristic) acceptations of the phrase; because I confess that, letting authority alone, I supposed the bare words, in such juxtaposition, would sufficiently convey the desired meaning. "Faith and good works" is another fancy, for instance, and perhaps no easier to arrive at: yet Giotto placed a pomegranate fruit in the hand of Dante, and Raffaele crowned his Theology (in the *Camera della Segnatura*) with blossoms of the same; as if the Bellari and Vasari would be sure to come after, and explain that it was merely "*simbolo delle buone opere—il qual Pomo granato fu però usato nelle vesti del Pontefice appresso gli Ebrei.*"
R.B.
 296 *Scudi.* Ancient Italian coins, worth about 4/-
 301 *St. Nepomucene of Prague.* John of Nepomuk, the patron saint of Bohemia, a martyr to the seal of confession (? 1330-1383), canonised 1729
 302 *Cur fremuêre gentes.* Psalm ii. 1
 309 *Western lands.* America
 317 **CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY,** a Foolscape 8vo. volume, was published by Chapman & Hall, 186, Strand, in 1850 (printed

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- by Bradbury & Evans, Whitefriars). The text of the present issue is from a copy of this 1850 vol.
- 320 *Gallio*. Acts xviii. 17
- 320 *Saint John's Candlestick*. See Rev. i. 20
- 333 *baldachin*. A canopy over the Reserved Sacrament, on the High Altar
- 325 *Terpander*. A Greek (Lesbian) musician and poet, the founder of Greek classical music (7th cent. B.C.)
- 343 *When A . . . like G*. The Hebrew letter Aleph signifies an ox from the supposed resemblance of its form, and Gimel represents a camel
- 346 *anapest*. A foot of three syllables, the first two short and the third long
- 346 *Iketides*. An imperfect play (The Suppliants) by Æschylus
- 351 *breccia*. A marble
- 356 *As Plato cries He doth*. Plutarch, Symposiacs viii. 2
- 362 *the giving men blind hopes*. See the 'Prometheus Bound'
- 364 *Lucemons*. 'Heads of ancient Etruscan families, and combining both priest and patriarch. The Kings were drawn from them' (Dr. Furnivall)
- 364 *Fourier's scheme*. The Communism of F. M. C. Fourier (1772-1837), the French socialist
- 375 *Buonarotti*. Michelangelo Buonarotti (1475-1564)
- 383 **MEN AND WOMEN**. The text is that of the 2 volume (Foolscap 8vo.) edition of 1855, published by Chapman and Hall, 193, Piccadilly, and printed by Bradbury & Evans, Whitefriars. In these volumes Saul is given in full, and, therefore, here reprinted in full
- 399 *Fra Lippo Lippi*. Florentine painter (1412-69)
- 399 *The Carmine's my cloister*. The Carmelite monastery in Florence, where he was brought up
- 400 *Cosimo of the Medici* (1389-1464). 'The Ancient,' with whom the glories of the great Florentine family began
- 403 *antiphonary*. Gregory the Great's Roman Service Book
- Camaldolese*. An order of monks, now almost extinct, founded in 1018 by St. Romuald, a Benedictine (d. 1027)
- Preaching Friars*. The Dominicans, founded in 1215
- 404 *Giotto*. G. di Bondone (? 1266-1337) Florentine painter
- 406 *Brother Angelico*. Fra Angelico (1387-1455), Tuscan painter
- Brother Lorenzo*. Don Lorenzo or Il Monaco (1370-1425)
- 406 *Guidi*. Tommaso Guidi or Masaccio (1401-1428), Florentine painter
- 408 *Prato*. A town near Florence
- 409 *hot cockles*. A child's game
- 410 *A Toccata of Galuppi's*. A fantasia by the Italian composer Galuppi (1708-1785)
- 411 *clavichord*. A keyed and stringed instrument now superseded by the pianoforte

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- 411 *the dominant's persistence.* The dominant in music is the name given to the fifth note of the scale of any key, counting upwards. The dominant plays a most important part in cadences, in which it is indispensable that the key should be strongly marked. (Grove, quoted by Berdoe)
- lesser thirds . . . sevenths.* 'The interval of the third is one of the most important; the signature of a piece may mislead one, the same signature standing for a major key and its relative minor; but the third of the opening chord decides the question, a lesser "plaintive" third (composed of a tone and a semitone) showing the tone to be *minor*; the greater third (composed of two whole tones) showing the key to be *major* . . . Next come the "diminished sixths:" these are sixths possessing a semitone less than a minor sixth . . . a suspension is the stoppage of one or more parts for a moment, while the others move on; this produces a dissonance, which is only resolved by the parts which produced it moving on to the position which would have been theirs had the parts moved simultaneously . . . "Those commiserating sevenths," of all dissonances, none is so pleasing to the ear, or so attractive to musicians, as that of minor and diminished sevenths, that of the major seventh being crude and harsh; in fact, the minor seventh is so charming in its discord as to suggest concord.' Miss Helen Ormerod, quoted by Berdoe
- 426 *snake-stone.* Stones or compositions of various kinds, used as remedies against snake-bites
- 427 *a spider here weaves no web,* etc. Spiders have long had a reputation in the medical art. Browning's non-web-weaving one has been identified by Dr. H. McCook as the Zebra Spider (*Epiblemum scenicum*). They kill their prey in the open (Berdoe)
- gum-tragacanth.* A gum from the *astragalus* used in medicine and in the arts
- 431 *Greek fire.* One of the precursors of gunpowder
- 433 *borage.* A plant prized by the ancients for its medicinal properties
- 436 *calotypist.* Photographer
- 441 *dartles, shoots*
- 441 *Instans tyrannus.* For the title of this poem see Horace, Odes III. 3. 1.
- Childe Roland.* Childe was a title of honour during the probation of knighthood
- Mr. Nettleship's essay upon this difficult poem may be recommended
- 457 *the square.* The Piazza della Annunziata
- Riccardi.* A noble Florentine family
- 457 *encolure.* The neck and shoulders of a horse
- 458 *a crime.* The destruction by the Medici of the city's liberties
- Cosimo and his cursed son.* Cosimo dei Medici (1389-1464) and his grandson Lorenzo the Magnificent (1448-1492)
- 458 *catafalk.* A stage used to support the coffin in funeral ceremonies

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- 460 *Arno*. The river of Florence
Petraja. A suburb of Florence
- 462 *Robbia's craft*. 'Robbia ware' was enamelled terra cotta. The reference is probably to art-craft generally. The Robbia family was famous in Florentine art history
- 463 *John of Douay*. Giovanni da Bologna (1524-1608), an Italian sculptor
- 465 *De te, fabula*. Let the story strike home, it is told of you, yourself
- 474 *fugues*. 'A short, complete melody, which *flies* (hence the name) from one part to another, while the original part is continued in counterpoint against it.' (Sir G. Macfarren, quoted by Berdoe)
- claviers*. The keyboards of an organ
- 476 *breves as they wrote them of yore*. Music notes, written, of old, square and large
- 477 *crepitant . . . strepitant*, rattling . . . noisy
O Danaides, O Sieve. The fifty daughters of Danaos married to the fifty sons of Ægyptos, killed (all but one) their husbands on their wedding night, and were punished by being compelled to draw water eternally in sieves
- Escobar*. A. Escobar y Mendoza (1589-1669), Spanish Jesuit
Est fuga, volvitur rota. It is a flight, the wheel rolls round
- 477 *risposting*. A term in fencing=here, making a repartee
- 478 *tickens*. Ticking, stout woven cloth
- 479 *meâ pœnâ*. At the risk of being punished
Palestrina. G. Pierluigi da Palestrina (1524-1594), the greatest Italian musical composer, and reformer of Church music for the Council of Trent
- 480 *Bishop Blougram*. Cardinal Wiseman is the model but the portrait is untrue and, in so far as it is a portrait, unfair
Pugin. A. W. N. Pugin (1812-1852) architect of many Catholic churches in England, son of A. C. Pugin (1762-1832), and father of E. W. Pugin (1834-1875), both of whom were also architects
- 481 *Che ch'è*. What, what
Count D'Orsay (1801-1852). The last of the Dandies
- 483 *the marvellous Modenese*. Antonio Allegri or Correggio was born at Correggio, near Parma, Modena, in 1494
- 488 *Hildebrand*. Pope Gregory VII. (1020-1085), whose name is most closely associated with the temporal claims of the papacy
- 490 *Verdi . . . Rossini* 'Verdi wrote a poor opera, which pleased the audience on the first night, and they loudly applauded. Verdi nervously glanced at Rossini, sitting quietly in his box, and read the verdict in his face.' (Berdoe)
- 491 *Schelling*. F. W. J. von Schelling (1775-1854) German philosopher
- 493 *Giulio Romano*. G. Dei Giannuzzi, Raphael's chief pupil (1492-1546)
Dowland's lute. John Dowland (1563?-1626?), lutenist and composer
Pandulph, of fair Milan cardinal. Shakespeare's King John, III. 1
- 494 *Strauss*. D. F. Strauss (1808-1874) a Tübingen philosopher, author of a *Life of Jesus*
- 499 *Bomba*. The nickname bestowed upon Ferdinand II. of Naples (1810-1859)

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- 119** *lazzaroni*. Beggars
Antonelli. (1806-1876) A Cardinal and Secretary to Pope Pius IX.
Naples' liquefaction. A small quantity of the blood of S. Januarius (3rd century) is kept at Naples, amongst the Church's relics; it is solid, but is stated to liquify when brought near the saint's head
Fichte, J. G. German philosopher (1762-1814), founder of "absolute idealism"
- 505 *in partibus Episcopos*. Catholic Bishops in non-Catholic countries are styled Bishops 'in partibus Infidelium.' They take their titles from foreign Sees. This was the case in England prior to the re-establishment of the Catholic hierarchy in 1850
- 507 *Andrea del Sarto*. A. d'Agnolo (1487-1531), Florentine painter
Fiesole. A hill-suburb of Florence
- 510 *The Urbinate*. Raphael, who was born at Urbino, 1483
George Vasari. Architect, painter and biographer (1511-1574) chiefly known for his 'Lives of Painters,' etc.
- 511 *Francis*. The 1st, of France (1494-1547), the patron of Andrea del Sarto
- 513 *cue-owls*. 'The Scops Owl, Its cry is a ringing "ki-ou" whence Italian "chiù" or "ciù"' (Berdoe)
- 514 *the New Jerusalem*. Rev. xxi. 15-17
Leonard. Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519)
- 522 *Dello*. Dello Delli (1404-?1466.) a fifteenth century Florentine painter
Stefano. A fourteenth century Italian painter
Theseus . . . dying Alexander. The sculptures indicated in these few lines are, respectively, the 'Theseus, one of the statues of the Parthenon at Athens, now in the British Museum . . . Niobe, chief figure of the celebrated group of statues, "Niobe all tears for her children," in the Uffizi gallery at Florence; the Racer's frieze of the Parthenon; dying Alexander, a fine piece of ancient Greek sculpture at Florence' (Berdoe)
- 524 *Giotto . . . O*. Vasari tells that Giotto with one turn of his hand drew a perfect and exact circle which was handed to the Pope's messenger as a specimen of his art with respect to a suggested commission. His is the Campanile, or bell-tower at Florence.
- 526 *Nicolo the Pisan*. A thirteenth-century sculptor
Cimabue (1240-1302). The first of the restorers of Italian art
Ghiberti. Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378-1455), Goldsmith and bronze-caster. He designed the bronze gates of the Baptistery at Florence
Ghirlandajo. Domenico Bigordi or Ghirlandaio (1449-1494), Florentine painter
- 527 *Bigordi*. See above. A family of Florentine painters
Sandro. Alexandro Filipepi or Boticelli, Florentine painter (1447-1510)
Lippino. Florentine painter (1460-1504), the son of Fra Lippo Lippi, "wronged," because some of his pictures have been attributed to others
Taddeo Gaddi. Florentine painter and architect (1300-1366) a disciple of Giotto

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- 527 *intonaco*. Rough-cast
Pollajolo. Antonio Pollaiuolo (1429-1498), Florentine goldsmith and painter
tempera. A mixture of water and egg-yolk
Alesso Baldovinetti. Florentine painter (1427-1499)
Margheritone of Arezzo. M. di Magnano. Sculptor and architect (1216-1293)
barret. Cloak
- 528 *Zeno*. The founder of the Stoics (342-270 B.C.)
Ognissanti. All Saints
Detur amanti. Let it be given to him who loves
Jewel of Giamschid. The jewelled cup of Jamshid, King of the Genii, contained the Elixir of Life
Radetsky. Johann Josef Count Radetsky, Austrian field-marshal (1766-1858)
Witan-agemot. The Saxon Parliament
- 529 *curt Tuscan*. The literary language
Orgagna. Orcagna, Florentine painter, sculptor, etc. (1316-1376)
chimera. A fabulous fire-breathing monster
tale of Cambuscan. A Tartar king. See Chaucer's 'Squire's Tale'
beccaccia. Wood-cock
- 543 *baladine*. Dancer
- 572 *Hebron*. One of the cities of Refuge
Kidron. A brook in Jerusalem
- 584 *Holy-Cross Day*. The Festival of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross is on September 14th. It is stated that the conversion of Constantine was due to the appearance of a cross in the sky, at mid-day, during his struggle with Maxentius, inscribed 'By this, conquer.'

The following notes by Browning in square brackets may be read in connection with the poem. The extract is, of course, fictitious. ["Now was come about Holy-Cross Day, and now must my lord preach his first sermon to the Jews: as it was of old cared for in the merciful bowels of the Church, that, so to speak, a crumb at least from her conspicuous table here in Rome, should be, though but once yearly, cast to the famishing dogs, under-trampled and bespitten-upon beneath the feet of the guests. And a moving sight in truth, this, of so many of the besotted, blind, restive and ready-to-perish Hebrews! now paternally brought—nay, (for He saith, 'Compel them to come in') haled, as it were, by the head and hair, and against their obstinate hearts, to partake of the heavenly grace. What awakening, what striving with tears, what working of a yeasty conscience! Nor was my lord wanting to himself on so apt an occasion; witness the abundance of conversions which did incontinently reward him: though not to my lord be altogether the glory."—*Diary by the Bishop's Secretary*, 1600]

[The present Pope (i.e. Pope Gregory XVI.) abolished this bad business of the sermon.—R.B.]

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- 584 *handsel*. Experience for the first time
- 585 *cog*. Wheedle, seduce
- 588 *Fano*. An Italian city on the Adriatic shore. The picture is in the Church of S. Augustine
- 589 *Guercino*. G. F. Barbieri, called Guercino from his squint (1590-1666)
Alfred. Alfred Domett ("Waring")
Ancona. On the Adriatic coast of Italy
- 590 *As certain also of your own poets have said*. Acts xvii., 28
- 592 *phare*. Lighthouse
- 602 *Tyrian shells*. Murex and other shells, which secreted a much-valued dye
- 602 *Astarte*. The Phœnician goddess of the moon, the Ashtoroth of Scripture
- 603 *The Heretic's Tragedy*. Browning's descriptive title and note read thus :—"ROSA MUNDI; SEU, FULCITE ME FLORIBUS. A CONCEIT OF MASTER GYSBRECHT, CANON-REGULAR OF SAINT JODOCUS-BY-THE-BAR, YPRES CITY. CANTUQUE, *Virgilius*. AND HATH OFTEN BEEN RUNG AT HOCK-TIDE AND FESTIVALS. GAVISUS ERAM. *Jessides*."
 "(It would seem to be a glimpse from the burning of Jacques du Bourg-Molay [Grand Master of the Knights Templars] at Paris, A.D. 1314; as distorted by the refraction from Flemish brain to brain, during the course of a couple of centuries.—R.B.)"
- 604 *clavicithern*. An upright musical instrument, probably resembling a harpsichord
bavins. Fagots of brushwood
billets. Logs of wood
- 605 *Sharon's rose*. Song of Solomon ii. 1
- 606 *leman*. Sweetheart
- 607 *fennel*. A fragrant umbelliferous plant
- 609 *A Grammarian's Funeral*. Browning's note states '[Time—Shortly after the revival of learning in Europe]'
- 611 *Calculus*. The disease popularly known as stone
Tussis. A cough
soul-hydroptic. Thirsty, as in dropsy
- 615 *prolusion*. Prelude, overture
Swedish Boehme. Jakob Boehme, the mystic (1575-1624)
- 616 *Halberstadt, John*. A magician and botanist
- 617 *dalmatic*. An ecclesiastical vestment
- 617 *Rafael . . . sonnets*. There is no evidence of this: 'his lady' was La Fornarina
- 618 *Her, San Sisto names*. The Sistine Madonna, in Dresden
Her, Foligno. In the Vatican
Her, that visits Florence in a vision. Del Granduca, in the Pitti Palace, Florence
Her, that's left with lilies in the Louvre. La Belle Jardinière in the Louvre
Guido Reni. A painter of the school of Bologna (1575-1642). The book was one of designs, apparently
- 619 *Bice*. Dante's Beatrice

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- 620 "*Egypt's flesh-pots.*" Exodus xvi. 3
Sinai-forehead's cloven brilliance. Exodus xxxiv. 29, 30
Jethro's daughter. Exodus iii. 1
Ethiopian bond-slave. Num. xii. 1
622 *Samminiato.* A church in Florence
Paved-work of a sapphire. Exodus xxiv. 10

A.R.W.

The following poem, printed in 'The Keepsake,' 1856, but not included in Browning's Collected Works, may here be given:—

BEN KARSHOOK'S WISDOM

[KARSHOOK = THISTLE]

"Would a man 'scape the rod?"
 Rabbi Ben Karshook saith,
 "See that he turn to God
 The day before his death."

"Ay could a man enquire
 When it shall come!" I say,
 The Rabbi's eye shoots fire—
 "Then let him turn to-day!"

Quoth a young Sadducee:
 "Reader of many rolls,
 Is it so certain we
 Have, as they tell us, souls?"

"Son, there is no reply!"
 The Rabbi bit his beard:
 "Certain, a soul have I—
 We may have none," he sneer'd.

Thus Karshook, the Hiram's-Hammer,
 The Right-hand Temple-column,
 Taught babes in grace their grammar,
 And struck the simple, solemn.

Rome, April 27, 1854.

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